

# MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES: OUR MISSOURI WATERS

by Jennifer Hoggatt

Missouri has been blessed with abundant and diverse water resources like few other states in the nation. The quality of life for each Missourian can be closely tied to the health of our state's natural resources. Ensuring we are able to enjoy our Missouri waters today as well as ensure the same for future generations is the essence of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) mission.

Missouri waters are not only essential for our health and quality of life; they also play a critical role in the state's overall economic well-being. Lakes, rivers and streams provide quality drinking water, abundant fish stocks, irrigation, recreation and other vital services.

Creating a rich legacy for Missouri's waters can be a daunting task. DNR's "Our Missouri Waters" effort brings together an engaged local citizenry and good science to provide the perfect balance to create the best path forward to improve and maintain healthy waters.

At the heart of it, Our Missouri Waters is a statewide framework, operating at the 8-Digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) scale. The program has identified 66 watersheds in Missouri.

It is a framework whose main goals are to engage and inform local watershed citizens so that they may prioritize and act to ensure clean and abundant water for their watershed and local communities for generations to come.

Complementary to this, it also creates a framework where resources work more effectively together to provide a holistic watershed benefit.

Through this process, the department is committed to continuously adapting and improving Our Missouri Waters by incorporating stakeholder suggestions and providing current information.

Missouri's municipal government partners play a key role in the Our Missouri Waters conversations. Community leaders many times have important information about water needs and impacts to the local water supply. By understanding the value of the local water supply and the challenges, the department and other agencies can provide more effective, practical solutions that provide multiple benefits.



## THE OUR MISSOURI WATERS STRATEGY

Understanding what is going on and what is important in a watershed takes a team approach. DNR and other agencies collect information that helps provide a characterization of the watershed. However, that is just the first step in truly understanding and planning a course of action that is practical and effective.

Information must be shared with local citizens who know their watershed better than most. By sharing information and building a common understanding of the watershed and its priorities, local citizens and resource agencies can work together to build

practical, obtainable goals and action plans to ensure clean and abundant water for generations to come. As actions are implemented, progress can be measured to understand if the course of action is having the desired effect. Using information gained from progress, the partners can adapt and adjust action plans to ensure continuous improvement and progress toward shared goals.

## SHARING AND COOPERATION

In order to provide the best information about each watershed, DNR has developed a new process and format that helps staff engage with each other across divisions and programs. This cooperation allows the department

## Wa · ter · shed:

*noun*

An area of land that drains water into a particular lake, river or wetland.

to produce an integrated, easy-to-understand overview of the water resources within each watershed. This overview is titled, "The State of Our Missouri Waters," and provides readers with information about water quantity, water quality, current water protection activities within the watershed, and a list of resources for additional information. State of Our Waters

## COMMUNITY SERVICES TEAM

Our Missouri Waters conversations have already helped the department identify some of the key challenges faced in watersheds throughout the state. With that knowledge, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources has also added new resources to address local challenges. Shortly after completing the pilot phase of Our Missouri Waters, the department implemented a community services program to respond to challenges uniquely faced by community leaders, especially those in small, rural communities throughout the state. These leaders must make decisions about their city's infrastructure to meet the needs of their current and future population. Small communities that have experienced declining populations and diminishing income face the greatest hardship to meet the costs associated with maintaining and improving aging public infrastructure.

The community services team helps local governments responsible for environmental protection in their communities by:

- Answering questions and providing one-on-one assistance on specific environmental issues.
- Helping communities find resources such as technical assistance; grants and loans; and training.
- Assisting small, financially and technically challenged communities with developing a comprehensive plan to address current and future environmental needs.

Wastewater treatment and drinking water infrastructure are some of the most valuable assets owned by a city or town, and have a significant impact on the community's health, economy and overall well-being. Community and watershed benefits that follow infrastructure installation, maintenance and upgrades include:

- Improved public health with access to clean drinking water and reduced or eliminated sanitary sewer overflows;
- Cleaner and safer streams and lakes for swimming and fishing
- Reduced utility energy costs;
- Boosted local economies with state and federal low-interest loans and grants;
- Increased property values;
- Improved community attractiveness for new business development.



Citizens from a variety of groups in the Lower Grand River Watershed in north central Missouri are partnering to hold watershed trash pickup events.

publications are now available for all Group 1 watersheds and will soon be available for Group 2 watersheds (See Figure 1.) Additional groups will be available in the future. The publications can be found at the department's Our Missouri Waters website, [dnr.mo.gov/omw](http://dnr.mo.gov/omw).

## LOCAL ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

After compiling and sharing the information the department has for the watershed, the Our Missouri Waters framework focuses on a collaborative watershed process to engage local citizens, refine understanding, and set priorities and goals. The collaborative watershed process includes holding a series of meetings that have proven to be successful and aid in building a shared knowledge base and understanding of local water resources.

Public participation and attendance at watershed meetings plays a vital role in the success of Our Missouri Waters.

A watershed advisory committee comprised of local citizens is asked to consider and recommend the watershed's priorities and goals. Committee members develop a "Healthy Watershed Plan" that documents their discussions; the priorities and goals the members have outlined for the watershed; and the next steps members feel are necessary to reach their goals.

Citizens are already taking action to protect their valuable water resources. In the Lower Grand River Watershed in north central Missouri, local volunteers and businesses, adopt-a-highway groups, the Missouri Stream Team program, the North Central Missouri Regional Water Commission, and the Missouri Departments of Natural Resources, Transportation and Conservation are partnering to hold watershed trash pickup events.

In the North Fork Salt River watershed in northeast Missouri, Our Missouri Waters has helped increase interaction between local citizens. They have been able to discuss information and understand that protection of their drinking water supply is a priority they all share. Municipal leaders, farmers, citizens, and others are working together to reduce sediment accumulation in their drinking water reservoir. Sediment in the water supply requires increased treatment to make it safe to drink, leading to increased cost for all water users. Farmers are



increasing their use of soil conservation practices, namely by planting cover crops. Not only does this provide protection against sediment entering the water supply, but farmers can also see benefits in increased soil health and a boost to their bottom line. Our Missouri Waters is working with partners, such as soil and water conservation districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Clarence Cannon Wholesale Water Commission, and University of Missouri Extension to host soil health workshops in each of the six counties in the watershed.

American author Jim Watkins is quoted as saying, "A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence." Water truly is a driving force in our lives, and with your help, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources will continue to work persistently and passionately to ensure Missouri communities, citizens and visitors have clean and abundant water for generations to come. □

Jennifer Hoggatt is the Our Missouri Waters Statewide Coordinator. Learn more at <http://dnr.mo.gov/omwl/>.

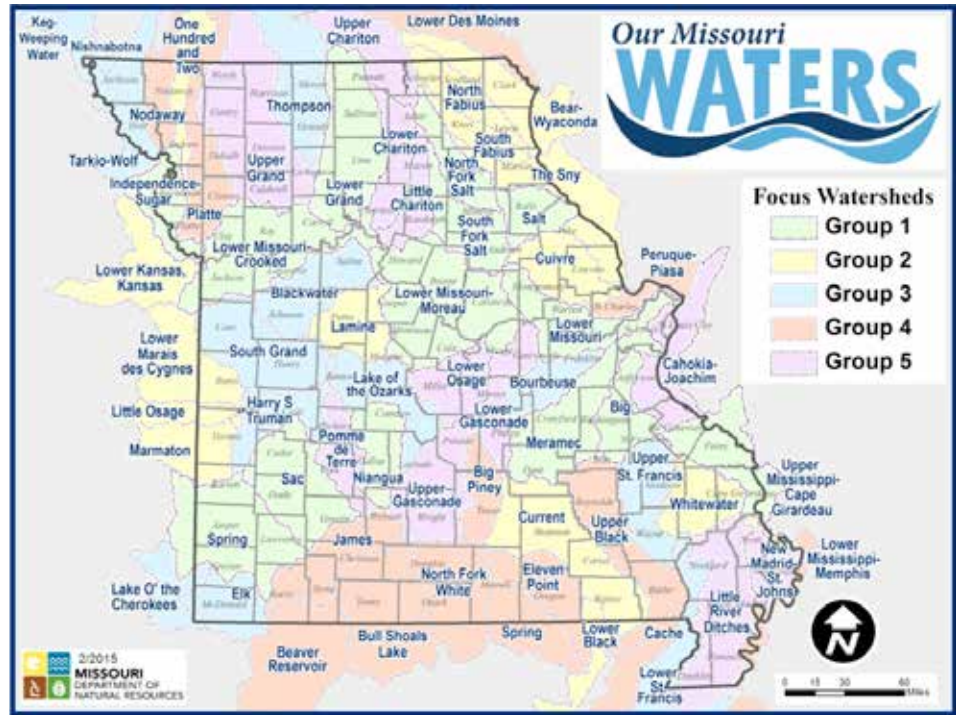


Figure 1.

There are 66 HUC 8 watersheds in Missouri. They are grouped into groups of approximately 12-15 watersheds each.

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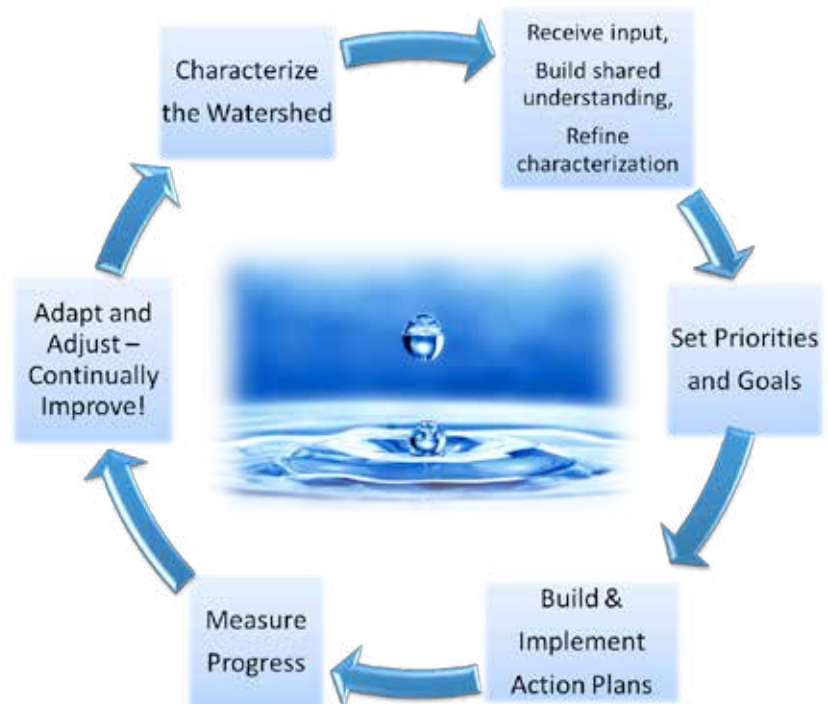
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**Our Missouri Waters Adaptive Management Strategy**



Missouri's regional watershed coordinators work closely with the community to move through each milestone of the Adaptive Management Strategy (above). Each watershed begins with the first step on the wheel, "Characterize the Watershed."