

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2007

Department:Rural Sociology

Degree:MS

Title:Master of Science in Rural Sociology

In Missouri, 70% of the population lives in or around an urban area. Unplanned development increases the stress on already altered ecosystems, while compromising water quality and water resources.

Many researchers are beginning to realize the importance of considering public attitudes when making natural resource plans and policies. This study explored the attitudes and opinions of 4,653 homeowners in the Hinkson Creek watershed regarding water quality and environmentalism in the watershed.

The Hinkson Creek flows north to south through Boone County and the city of Columbia (population 90,000) in central Missouri with a watershed that covers approximately 57,500 acres. The urban portion of Hinkson Creek was placed on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of impaired waters in 1998.

Eight focus groups were conducted with people living in rural, exurban, suburban and urban portions of the watershed. They revealed a high level of concern for the large amount of development occurring in Boone County and how it will affect streams.

A mail survey, designed from the information gained from the focus groups, revealed that respondents know little about water quality in their area; whether Hinkson Creek was polluted, the largest contributors of water pollution to Hinkson Creek and they did not understand the term nonpoint source pollution. The majority of the respondents believed that overdevelopment was the most serious issue in the watershed and that small changes in their daily lives would improve water quality. The information gained in this study will be used to develop educational programs.