

Social Assessment

Prepared by Tom Makowski, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Introduction

The Illinois River Watershed is located in Josephine and Curry Counties in Oregon, and Del Norte County in California. Land in the watershed is mostly uninhabited by people. It is a rugged land, not especially easily adaptable for human occupancy. The exception is a broad alluvial fan in the Cave Junction area of Josephine County. The county population as of July 1, 1998 was 74,377. Most of the people in the watershed are assumed to live in or around the Cave Junction area.

Summary of Concerns

The human, biological and physical health of the Illinois River watershed is intricately entwined. Agriculture, forestry and mining provide a major source of economic stability. The recreational, aesthetic and intrinsic nature of the area enhances the quality of life of residents, and attracts visitors and new residents. To their credit, area residents have demonstrated a commitment to protecting the area's natural resources. However, not unlike other communities, there are differences about the best way to manage the area's natural resources. Qualified community leadership is needed in the Illinois River watershed to resolve conflicts, negotiate differences and broker mutually beneficial agreements aimed at restoring and managing the watershed's natural resources.

Scope

Many people in the watershed make their living in occupations directly related to the natural resources of the area: farming, forestry, ranching and mining. The 1997 Census of Agriculture reported that although the number of farms in Josephine County decreased by about 5 percent since 1992 (from 303 farms to 288 in 1997), the land in farms has increased by 11 percent (from 31,249 acres in 1992 to 34,565 acres in 1997). Average farm increased 10 percent from 51 acres in 1992 to 56 acres in 1997. The market value of agricultural products sold in Josephine County increased to \$29,670,000 in 1997. Crop sales accounted for 66 percent of the market value. Livestock sales accounted for 34 percent of the market value. These numbers indicate that agriculture in at least one county in the watershed is an increasingly critical element in the economy of the area, especially for the 616 farm operators in Josephine County alone.

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) reports that the timber harvest for 1995 (the most recent year available for volume removed in board feet) for all lands in Josephine County was 55,143,000 board feet. Timber industry representatives in the county have reported that harvests are way down and that local residents in the industry feel they have already "lost the war" when it comes to being able to ever revive the timber industry to a level more reminiscent of the 1970's. Indeed, 1995 ODF reports show that harvest in the State

has decreased from nearly eight million board feet in 1977 to just over four million in 1995. However, ODF figures from 1995 show that the number of harvested acres in the State was 627,668 acres. Thereby, the forestry and the timber and wood products industry remain a vital part of the Oregon economy and people's lives.

Results/Discussion

Preliminary information for a social assessment was collected during a brief visit to the Illinois River Watershed area in the fall of 1996. A subsequent site visit to the area is needed to update and validate previously collected information and to collect additional information. With the additional social information, a complete social assessment, useful for watershed planning, could then be written. However, *preliminary* social information indicates the following:

- Area residents agree that the Illinois River watershed is a wonderful place to live, to work and to raise a family. The community is not without its problems, but none that are not manageable – even the natural resource management problems.
- The community, like any growing community, is changing. There are opportunities to make a living but not in the same (natural resource dependent) occupations as there were five or ten years ago. The ongoing economic/occupational transition presents a lifestyle change difficult for both current area residents and people moving into the area.
- Landowners along the river are willing to adopt some fish-friendly conservation practices. In 1996, 38 landowners had requested assistance implementing 25 conservation projects, including fish enhancement structures, bank stabilization and the removal of push-up dams that block fish passage. This voluntary landowner action precedes any formal watershed protection planning and efforts to encourage landowner participation indicating a willingness of some landowners to proactively adopt conservation.
- Among virtually all residents there is common ground in two areas critical to improving and sustaining the health of the Illinois River Valley watershed:
 1. Long-time residents recognize change in the community is inevitable (even if a bit reluctantly and without much enthusiasm). However, to the person they all agree that they are willing to work to improve the quality of life in the valley.
 2. There is a commitment and demonstrated willingness by many landowners, land managers and users to implement changes on their land to protect, and where necessary, restore natural resource habitat throughout the Illinois River watershed.
- The Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District and Illinois Basin Watershed Council work well together. This is probably because both groups include many of the same people. In a community with a small, relatively stable population, this can be an asset. On the other hand, in a community like the Illinois River Valley, with its

growing and relatively heterogeneous population, the overlap of group membership between the Conservation District and the Watershed Council limits representation and is likely to be a problem if watershed planning results from the watershed assessment.

- Under the best conditions cooperation, as a means of managing conflict and solving problems, is difficult. People in the Illinois River watershed community are not unlike most other communities in that there is no shortage of opinions about what *others* should do to solve the problem. However, as of 1996, in the Illinois River Valley watershed there appeared to be a lack of both the *ability and willingness* to successfully solve problems, negotiate differences, compromise and broker the agreements necessary to restore and manage the watershed.

References

1997 Census of Agriculture, Oregon State and County Data. Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, part 37. The US Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Issued March 1999.

1997 – 1998 Oregon Agriculture & Fisheries Statistics. Published by the US Department of Agriculture NASS and Oregon Department of Agriculture, 1999.

Illinois River Watershed Assessment and Action Plan. The Illinois Valley Watershed Council. March 1995.

Timber Harvest Report for Calendar Year 1995. Oregon Department of Forestry. Currently available on the ODF web page at www.odf.state.or.us.

The 25-Year Harvest History. Oregon Department of Forestry. Currently available on the ODF web page at www.odf.state.or.us.

