

A Comparative Analysis of Water Quality Monitoring Programs in the Southeast: Lessons for Tennessee

Ruth Anne Hanahan¹ and Caitlin Cottrill²

¹Ruth Anne Hanahan, Senior Research Associate, Tennessee Water Resources Research Center at the University of Tennessee, 311 Conference Center, Knoxville, TN 37996, rhanahan@utk.edu

²Caitlin Cottrill, Transportation Planner, Mid-America Regional Council, 600 Broadway, Suite 300, Kansas City, MO 64105, ccottrill@marc.org

Biographical Sketches of Authors

Ruth Anne Hanahan is a Senior Research Associate at the TN Water Resources Research Center (TN WRRC) located at the University of Tennessee. Over the past six years, her primary focus has been to build and manage the Knox County Adopt-A-Watershed Program. She conducts the program on behalf of the Water Quality Forum, a consortium dedicated to protecting and improving regional water quality. In addition to coordinating this hands-on environmental education program for the Forum, Ruth Anne has been integral in assisting with the development of other Forum educational/community outreach and technical projects including the recently established Adopt-A-Stream Program.

Caitlin Cottrill was employed as a Graduate Research Assistant at the TN WRRC while receiving her master's degree in urban planning from the University of Tennessee. She has participated in a number of planning activities involving environmental monitoring and planning for sustainable development. Caitlin is currently employed as a transportation planner at the Mid-America Regional Council in Kansas City, Missouri.

Abstract

The upsurge of state volunteer monitoring programs across the nation has been heralded as a way for citizens to turn knowledge into action including empowering them to make informed decisions and involving them in activities that directly protect state waterways. Tennessee does not currently have a statewide volunteer monitoring program, although there has been some preliminary discussion within the state's nonpoint source program to sponsor one. Building on this national movement and state interest, the TN Water Resources Research Center at the University of Tennessee has recently completed a study comparing three southeastern statewide volunteer monitoring programs, including Alabama Water Watch, Kentucky Water Watch and Georgia Adopt-A-Stream. The purpose of this comparative analysis was to examine how these programs have been implemented and learn from their experiences so that we could recommend to Tennessee policy decision makers and other stakeholders possible approaches to establishing such a program here in our state.

In order to provide a more substantive set of recommendations, we were also interested in acquiring information on the perceptions of the general benefits and limitations of volunteer monitoring. To that end, we surveyed volunteer monitors participating in the three state programs as well those in Tennessee who have an interest ("a stake") in expanding volunteer monitoring in the state. It is our hope that this study and its accompanying set of recommendations will advance a productive dialogue among Tennessee stakeholders on the viability of initiating a statewide volunteer monitoring program including actions necessary to make it happen.