

Watershed district receives \$60,000 grant from state

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The Marmaton Watershed District has received a state grant toward creating a program that focuses on improving water quality and evaluating all activities and projects within the watershed.

The district recently received a \$60,000 Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) grant that will fund the development phase of the program, a project that is formally sponsored by the Marmaton Watershed Joint District No. 102 with the collaboration of stakeholders within the boundaries of the district, including all of the Marais Des Cygnes Basin in Kansas lying south of the Little Osage River, according to a written statement from John George, a representative of Agricultural Engineering Associates in Uniontown.

The \$60,000 grant will fund the first of four phases in the WRAPS program; the development phase. Other stages include an assessment phase, a planning phase, and an implementation phase. The focus of WRAPS has historically been water quality, but officials intend to pursue a project to evaluate and work with all aspects of the watershed, the statement from George said.

The WRAPS program is necessary because it will emphasize to the public the importance of the watershed district, according to Kara Niemeir, a staff engineer at Agricultural Engineering Associates.

"It will make people more aware of the watershed and how each activity that we do affects the watershed," Niemeir said.

All watershed districts must implement a WRAPS program or similar process in order to receive state or federal aid, Marmaton Watershed board member Dean Mann said.

"It's a state grant under a federal mandate," Mann said. "All watersheds must have it in place to get grants or any support money."

The Marmaton Watershed District also includes land in Bourbon, Allen and Crawford counties, as well as significant additional drainage in Crawford County that includes the Farlington Lake Drainage, Bone Creek Lake, and all drainages below these bodies of water. The district also includes drainages on the Marmaton River east of Fort Scott that runs to the Missouri border.

"It's a defined area that includes Bourbon County, and part of Allen and Crawford counties," Mann said. "When rain falls, all the water drains into the Watershed District."

The district includes 1,141 square miles of land, and 1,550 acres of public lakes, Niemeir said.

"I don't think some people realize just how big that is," she said.

The WRAPS process involves four phases, starting with the development phase that officials will begin work on soon, followed by the other phases that will take place gradually, the statement from George said.

"We just submitted an application for the assessment phase which should be funded and will start early next year," George said in the statement. "The planning phase would be next, followed by the implementation phase."

The development phase will mostly be funded through the \$60,000 state grant, with a minimum of \$40,000 in eligible matching funds required by the district, making the total cost for the first phase of the program \$100,000, Mann said.

The development phase will include the organization of a watershed leadership team, the identification of shareholder issues, the compiling of information, and will also help the watershed board to address any problems that may arise, Mann said.

Niemeir said some of those problems include excessive water runoff and flooding that have occurred in the area in recent months, such as the severe flooding that dumped between 18 and 20 inches of rain in Bourbon County in late June and early July.

In the near future, members of the Marmaton Watershed District board of directors, which oversees the watershed, plan to provide information and demonstrations in an attempt to educate the public about the WRAPS program grant and the watershed. There will soon be a Web site developed concerning the Marmaton Basin and the WRAPS initiative.

There are also plans to have presentations developed and made available for civic groups, schools and other organizations, the statement from George said.

The board recently conducted a work session concerning the WRAPS grant, and will conduct a public meeting to inform the public about the issue at 5:15 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 24 at Citizens Bank, N.A., 200 S. Main St.

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