INTRODUCTION

Research examined how Minnesota’s water policies could better connect citizens to management activities of the local surface waters that impact their lives, thus promoting citizen accountability and stewardship. Additionally, research examined the role of policy in coordinating community actions across multiple watersheds to achieve state water quality goals through the cumulative actions of grassroots efforts. The project employed Minnesota’s Lake Improvement District Statute as a platform to examine the policy mechanisms that connect water management policies to concerned citizens. A Lake Improvement District (LID) is a local unit of government (comprised exclusively of citizens) established by resolution of county boards to affect water quality by securing grants and taxing landowners to support mitigation activities within a watershed district (Chapter 378 MN Statutes 2005, §§103B.501 to 103B.581). Mitigation activities within a LID may include activities like erosion control, septic system improvements, or invasive species control to improve water quality. Preliminary research showed that there were barriers to the diffusion of the LID program, with Minnesota currently having only 32 active LIDs while Wisconsin is home to over 200 Lake Districts (LDs). An early policy analysis of the two states’ lake district statutes found them to be similar, indicating that something outside of the language and guidelines of the statute was influencing the diffusion of the two programs.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The Consortium’s grant funded fieldwork in Wisconsin for the summer of 2008. Time in Wisconsin was spent interviewing the major players in the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership including representatives from the University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL), and citizens from Wisconsin Lake Districts or Lake Associations. What emerged was the fact that the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership created highly structured institutional arrangements between the University of Wisconsin, WAL, and the Wisconsin DNR in relation to lake management activities. Within the partnership, Wisconsin’s Lake District formation was at one point tied to grant dollars. In essence, to be eligible for grants from the Wisconsin DNR citizens had to first form a Lake District. By comparison, Minnesota has no comparable formal partnership concerning lake management activities structuring how stakeholders interact with each other, nor has the LID program been incentivized the way it was in Wisconsin. Findings pointed to the fact that further research on how Minnesota’s water policies connect with citizens would need to examine where citizen-based water stewardship activities were situated in the state’s institutional landscape.
RESULTS


Steiger-Meister, K.; Becker, D.R. Citizen stewardship of water resources: A look at how water policy can create and coordinate citizen action in Minnesota for environmental change. Manuscript in preparation for Water Policy.

PRESENTATIONS & CONFERENCES

The Art of Science: Creating a Better Future, Association of Science-Technology Centers 2009 annual conference, attendant, Forth Worth, TX. (10/09)

Connecting Environmental Policy with Citizen Engagement: A Comparative Study Between Minnesota’s Lake Improvement Districts and Wisconsin’s Lake Districts, Minnesota Water Resources Conference, University of Minnesota in Saint Paul, MN. (10/09) Abstract accepted


Minnesota’s Lake Improvement Districts, presenter and panelist, Lakes and Rivers Conference hosted by Minnesota Waters, Rochester, MN. (5/09)

When ripples become waves: building synergy among local stakeholders to affect top-down water policy, presenter, International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Community Involvement in Resource Planning session, University of Vermont in Burlington, VT. (6/08)

For a conference agenda and an example of publicity see the following attached documents:


ADDITIONAL GRANTS RECEIVED

Graduate School Block Grant Fellowship, Natural Resources Science and Management Graduate Program, University of Minnesota (5/09)

FUTURE PROJECT PLANS

This project will contribute to my Ph.D. dissertation. Preliminary findings from the Consortium funded research shaped my final stage of fieldwork where I am currently examining how Minnesota’s institutional structures and arrangements impact citizen participation in water stewardship activities at both a state and county level. The goal date for completion of the dissertation and final defense is May of 2010.