

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Limestone County Forms a New Watershed Partnership and Implements French Mill/Piney Creek Watershed Project

By [Sam Sandlin](#), Watershed Coordinator, Madison County SWCD, Huntsville, AL

The Limestone County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) started a new watershed partnership with stakeholders interested in improving water quality in two local streams — French Mill and Piney Creek.

The Limestone County SWCD board and staff, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist Joyce Lane, representatives from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), the Limestone County Commission, the Limestone County Cattleman's Association, Alabama Water Watch (AWW), and Alabama A&M University in Huntsville have taken an active role in implementing the French Mill and Piney Creek Watershed Program.



Mark Sport with ADEM (l) and Sam Sandlin with Limestone County SWCD facilitate the watershed kickoff meeting at Belle Mina.

In 2013, the group started by researching land use and stream sampling data on these creeks and put together a watershed management plan as a “roadmap” for the project. In January 2014, the Limestone County SWCD was awarded a Section 319 grant from ADEM. The 319 grant for French Mill and Piney Creek will be used to implement conservation practices on private land that will help filter runoff and benefit water quality.

French Mill is a tributary to larger Piney Creek and both streams were initially listed as impaired from pathogens (fecal coliform) according to past data. Livestock and failing septic tanks are believed to be the sources. Both streams are located to the north and east of the city of Athens.

The Watershed Project officially kicked off March 2014 with a public meeting at the Belle Mina Agricultural Experiment Station. The audience was presented information regarding history and water quality data for the area, information regarding program eligibility, and information for available conservation practices offered. The Cattlemen's Association provided a steak dinner for all who attended.

Conservation Planning is available from NRCS/SWCD staff for all participants who apply. Approved conservation practices to treat grazing land, animal waste, or erosion issues may receive financial assistance through the local SWCD and 319 Program. Financial assistance of \$164,000.00 is available for improvements within the watershed through 2016.

Alabama A&M University students are tracking progress for the life of the project with monthly E. Coli sampling on French Mill Creek through the Alabama Water Watch volunteer water monitoring program. Data is sent to the AWW database, and hopefully, will show the installed conservation practices in the watershed are working.

For additional information, contact Sam Sandlin, watershed coordinator with the Limestone County SWCD at 256-232-4025 ext. 3.

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Dr. Wubishet Tedesse, Cedric Williams, Dr. Dawn Lemke from AAMU, and Sam Sandlin with Limestone County SWCD discuss stream sampling and the French Mill watershed project.



A water facility and heavy use area is just one conservation practice installed within French Mill watershed to prevent water quality problems within the watershed..