

About Rapid Watershed Assessments

Overview

A Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) is a set of information developed to assist local land managers, planner and leaders in evaluating future activities to address natural resource concerns on a watershed basis.

A complete assessment includes:

- A detailed [Watershed Profile](#) summarizes known information about the natural resources, current conditions and land use, resource concerns, and other factors within an 8-digit hydrologic unit.
- A set of dynamic [Watershed Assessment Matrices](#) provide estimates by landuse on the potential for conservation treatment in a watershed over a five-year period. The information is generated based on current conditions, local concerns, and average rates of local participation in conservation programs. Initial estimates are developed with data that assumes optimal levels of available conservation technical and financial assistance. Local conservation planners and other can run customized reports to reflect additional opportunities or considerations using the Microsoft Excel format of the Watershed Assessment Matrix. (The information in this tool is presented in tabular format.)

RWAs are developed to provide initial estimates of where conservation investments might best address local resource concerns. RWAs are intended to be used along with other relevant information to help local people evaluate the scope of their resource issues, determine local priorities, and establish potential costs, sources of assistance, or partners to involve. In addition, the RWAs may help to determine where additional studies may be needed.

The information contained in the RWA is pre-decisional, and does not represent a plan of action for conservation implementation; rather, it provides local people with a starting point for discussion and strategic planning regarding future collaborative conservation projects.

Methodology

A Rapid Watershed Assessment is developed by NRCS conservation planning teams working locally. The intent is to assemble a quick and inexpensive assessment that can be used for a variety of purposes at the local level. While the RWA provides a level of detail that is sufficient in identifying initial actions, the RWA may also help to identify areas where further, more detailed studies are needed.

The RWA is developed with information from NRCS staff with local professional knowledge. The RWA incorporates information on current levels of resource management, potential conservation opportunities, estimates of the effects of conservation activities on the local resource concerns, and local participation rates for the conservation programs. This information is merged with average installation, operation and maintenance costs for locally-relevant conservation practices. Before release, the information in the RWA is reviewed by additional local conservationists.