



Secretary of KDHE, Rod Bremby, addresses the audience at the Clarks Creek Watershed Ceremony.

# Clarks Creek Watershed Removed From Impaired Waters Listing

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**T**he legacy of Clarks Creek has changed for the better. Thanks to the voluntary efforts of local landowners in this prosperous agricultural watershed, Clarks Creek is being removed from the impaired waters list for the state of Kansas.

Clarks Creek is a small, 247-square mile watershed in Morris and Geary counties, located southeast of Junction City. With sixty-nine percent of the watershed in permanent grass, livestock and agriculture are a way of life in this area. Farmers and ranchers

have been relying on the productivity of the land and water of Clarks Creek for over a century. Livestock that graze on the native tallgrass prairie during the summer are typically moved to crop residue or small wintering lots or traps during the winter. Of the estimated eighty livestock dry lots in the watershed, about seventy-five percent of them are located within one-mile of the creek. Spring rainfall events have been known to transport the concentrations of bacteria into the stream, impairing the waters for primary recreation. While livestock have not been totally to blame for the impaired waters in Clarks Creek, it is undeniable that they have been a contributing factor.

Sampling that was conducted over an eight-year period prompted the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) to add Clarks Creek to the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list of

impaired waters for excessive concentrations of bacteria in 1998. By 2000, a total maximum daily load (TMDL) for bacteria was created for this small watershed, landing it on maps that made the local residents begin take notice. Thanks to state and federal incentive funds, and perhaps the fear of regulatory actions, local farmers and ranchers banded together to change the fate of Clarks Creek.

In 2005 a local group of stakeholders, primarily farmers and ranchers within the Clarks Creek Watershed, began pursuing a Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) grant through KDHE. By utilizing a WRAPS grant, the local group was able to focus their protection efforts in the areas that needed it the most. In addition to implementing best management practices through cost-share funds, the group determined that education was an essential tool in protecting the watershed. Multiple meetings and field days were held focusing on good livestock management practices. Many low-cost, high-impact management strategies were demonstrated and



The installation of grassed buffers throughout the watershed have the ability to reduce the loading of bacteria by fifty percent.

implemented as a result of the educational efforts. With the additional assistance of the local conservation districts and other partners, the installation of good conservation practices seemed to take off and have a snowball effect. In just a few years, Clarks Creek has seen more than seventy-nine acres of cropland be converted to native grass. There has been 8,518 feet of riparian and cross fencing established. Twelve alternate livestock supplies have been installed, designed to keep cattle from watering in the creek; twenty-one failing septic systems have been upgraded. These voluntary efforts made by local stakeholders have had a major impact on this watershed.

Thanks to the actions of the local landowners in Clarks Creek, along with the local, state, and federal agencies and partners, Clarks Creek is being removed from the 303(d) impaired waters list for the state of Kansas. Intense sampling conducted in 2008 found that the bacteria levels in Clarks Creek have consistently remained at lower levels, allowing KDHE to de-list this watershed in 2010. This success is proof that a watershed-based, teamwork approach really does work. The individual landowners of this watershed banded together to accomplish one common goal, proving that positive attitudes and actions in a community can make a significant impact.

### Celebrating success

A ceremony was held in the Clarks Creek Watershed recently, celebrating this success for Kansas. The farmers and ranchers of Clarks Creek made a commitment to their future, to better their legacy for their kids and grandkids, and continue to protect the lifeblood of their watershed. Many of the individuals who have participated in this project have deep roots into the Clarks Creek area, and they will be the first to tell you the importance of this water body. They have a vision of a better tomorrow for their families, and are taking action to improve the heritage they will leave to future



generations. The heart and souls and rich history of these families are deeply rooted into this watershed. The decisions they have made to build and protect their legacy is to be respected and celebrated.

If you would like more information on watershed and source water protection, give KRWA a call at 785-336-3760 or email to me directly at [katie@krwa.net](mailto:katie@krwa.net). Working together with agencies, we can make a difference!

*Katie Miller joined the KRWA staff in October 2009. She previously worked for Flint Hills Resource Conservation and Development as a Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Project Coordinator since*

*2003. She organized and coordinated the Twin Lakes Water Festival in 2005 – 2009; it has been attended by more than 6,000 participants.*



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