



Farmers cite concerns of impact of watershed plan on agriculture

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CARTHAGE, Mo. — Farmers may not have been the largest group in numbers, but they were vocal on Thursday night in raising concerns that agricultural interests might be the target of a watershed management plan for Spring River.

About 50 people attended a gathering at the Carthage Vo-Tech School to discuss concerns about the condition of Spring River in Carthage and what might be done to improve the quality of the water.

Public comments gathered in the session will become part of a watershed-management plan to qualify the region for funding to address water problems, said Jim Honey, Jasper County Eastern District associate commissioner.

“The goal is to get local people involved in finding solutions rather than setting up regulations,” said Dan Downing of the University of Missouri, who helped lead meeting discussions.

The group will target the stretch of Spring River in Carthage, where testing done by the Jasper County Health Department and a Carthage High School steam team has shown levels of E. coli bacteria exceeding state standards. The stream was identified as “impaired” by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources as a result of the team’s test results.

Those joining in the discussion said pinpointing the source of the bacteria and other water problems must be central to the study.

Poultry operations and litter spread on fields, along with other farming operations, were suggested as possible pollution sources. But others said septic tanks, wastewater-treatment plants and industrial runoff also were contributors.

“E. coli is from any warm-blooded animal, so it’s not easy to pinpoint,” Downing agreed.

One man said he formerly farmed in Arizona where farmers were required to fence their livestock out of rivers. He said he has a local cow-calf operation now and said he hopes the group can arrive at a solution “that doesn’t run me out of business.”

“People are wanting distilled water running in the river,” he said.

“I have a small business on the river and I want a solution that doesn’t overly burden you or me,” said another man.

“There’s more chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers running off lawns than are coming off my fields,” said another farmer. “Agriculture always gets the blame, but it’s not the reality.”

The comments came in the overall meeting and when the group was divided for small group discussions.

In attendance

Residents with land along Spring River through Carthage were identified and invited to the meeting open to anyone with an interest in Spring River. Sign-in sheets showed some participants were from Miller, La Russell and Golden City.

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