
AWRA 2011 ANNUAL WATER RESOURCES CONFERENCE
Albuquerque, New Mexico

November 7-10, 2011

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THE ROLE OF CATALYST EVENTS IN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: While an extensive literature exists about watershed groups, little is known about what triggers the formation of these groups or what causes individuals to get engaged. We hypothesize that certain events interact with existing conditions in a location to catalyze the formation of an individual or collective response to water quality threats. Few events, or undesirable conditions, gravitate to the level of a catalyst event. In some cases, two events which may appear to be similar will lead to very different outcomes in terms of corresponding actions. For example, news reports about a fish kill in one stream may mobilize farmers to work together to implement conservation practices. News reports about a fish kill in another stream may lead to no corresponding action. Catalyst events are also called focusing events, transformative events, trigger events and have been studied at length in the social movements literature as determinants of collective action. Catalyst events are also mentioned in case studies of watersheds, but there has been no prior effort to develop a typology of events that focus attention on water resources and lead to changes in conservation behaviors and management decisions. In this presentation, we will identify conditions and catalysts and present a typology of catalyst events based on our own research and a review of published theoretical and empirical literature on watershed planning and management.

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