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EPA Designates Center of Excellence for Watershed Management at Mississippi State University

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ATLANTA – Mississippi State University has been designated a Center of Excellence for Watershed Management, becoming the tenth such institution in the Southeast. Representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 4, the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Mississippi State University signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) today to help communities identify watershed based problems and develop and implement locally sustainable solutions.

“A watershed approach one of the most effective frameworks to engage communities and address today’s water resource challenges,” said EPA Regional Administrator Gwen Keyes Fleming. “Ultimately, this designation will help fulfill our mutual goals to protect and restore water quality and improve the quality of life in our local communities.”

“MDEQ has a history of partnering with our state’s academic institutions that comprise the Water Resources Research Institute. Together we have improved our approaches to water resource sustainability and water quality protection and restoration throughout the state,” said MDEQ Executive Director Trudy D. Fisher. “The focused science and applied research through the Center of Excellence for Watershed Management will further strengthen our efforts to address current challenges and needs related to water resources.”

The Center will be housed at Mississippi State University and will be a resource for universities throughout the state. To become a recognized Center of Excellence, the institution must demonstrate technical expertise in identifying and addressing watershed needs; involvement of students, staff and faculty in watershed planning, protection, and restoration; capability to involve the full suite of disciplines needed for all aspects of watershed management; financial ability to become self-sustaining; ability to deliver and account for results; willingness to partner with other institutions; and support from the highest levels of the organization.

"Mississippi State University is extraordinarily pleased to partner with the EPA for this Center of Excellence," said Dr. David Shaw, Vice President of Research & Economic Development at Mississippi State University. "Research in water quality and quantity is one of the highest priority areas for the University and our center will utilize the breath of capacity from the entire University to address these needs."

Some of the benefits of being a recognized Center of Excellence include receipt of EPA technical assistance where needed (instructors, speakers, etc); promotion of the Center of Excellence to stakeholders; EPA letters of support for grant opportunities; and identification of opportunities for Center of Excellence involvement in local and regional watershed issues.

For decades, EPA and Mississippi have protected the state's lakes, rivers and wetlands by regulating specific points of pollution; the most common of these being sewage treatment plants and factories. Although this approach led to the successful cleanup of many waterways, others still remain polluted from sources not as easily regulated. These more subtle sources include farms, streets, parking lots, lawns, rooftops or any other surfaces that come in contact with rainwater. Today, EPA and MDEQ take a broader approach to water protection, looking at both the individual waterway and the watershed in which it is located.

Started in 2007, the EPA Region 4 Centers of Excellence for Watershed Management Program works with colleges and universities from across the Southeast to provide hands-on, practical products and services for communities to identify watershed problems and solve them. Each EPA designated Center actively seeks out watershed-based stakeholder groups and local governments that need cost effective tools for watershed scientific studies, engineering designs and computer mapping, as well as assistance with legal issues, project management, public education and planning.

More information about EPA Region 4's other Centers of Excellence for Watershed Management in the Southeast is available at:

<http://epa.gov/region4/water/watersheds/index.html>

More information about priority watersheds in the Southeast is available online at:

<http://www.epa.gov/region4/water/watersheds/index.html>