Mississippi Embayment National Water-Quality Assessment – Cycle II: the Second Decade

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In 2001, the second decade of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Water-Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program began. The program has been redesigned, and the second decade is referred to as Cycle II. The number of study units has been reduced from 60 to 42, and each study unit will be revisited in three groups of 14 on a rotational schedule. In 2004, the Mississippi Embayment NAWQA will begin its second decade of the NAWQA Program. Similar to Cycle I, each group will be intensively studied for three years, followed by six years of low-intensity assessment. The primary emphasis of Cycle II (2001 – 2011) is to assess long-term trends in water quality and to improve our understanding of the factors and processes that govern water quality. An additional emphasis is to fill critical gaps remaining in the status assessment, the main focus of Cycle I (1991 – 2001). This balance of priorities follows the recommendation of the NAWQA Planning Team which concluded:

" The primary goals of NAWQA during its first decade continue to be appropriate as the program begins Cycle II. These goals are:

- Provide a nationally consistent description of current water-quality conditions for a large part of the nation's water resources. [*status*]
- Define long-term trends (or lack of trends) in water quality. [*trends*]
- Identify, describe, and explain, as possible, the major factors that affect observed water-quality conditions and trends. [*understanding*]

To be successful NAWQA must continue to focus on all of these goals. However, there should be a shift in the relative emphasis and resources given to the three goals as the program moves into its second decade. Relative to the first Cycle, the first goal, occurrence and distribution, should receive less emphasis in Cycle II. The third goal, explanation, should receive greater emphasis. The relative emphasis given to trends should increase in Cycle II because low-intensity phase sampling, a key component for trends analysis, was not fully implemented during Cycle I."