



# THE KIAMICHI WATERSHED

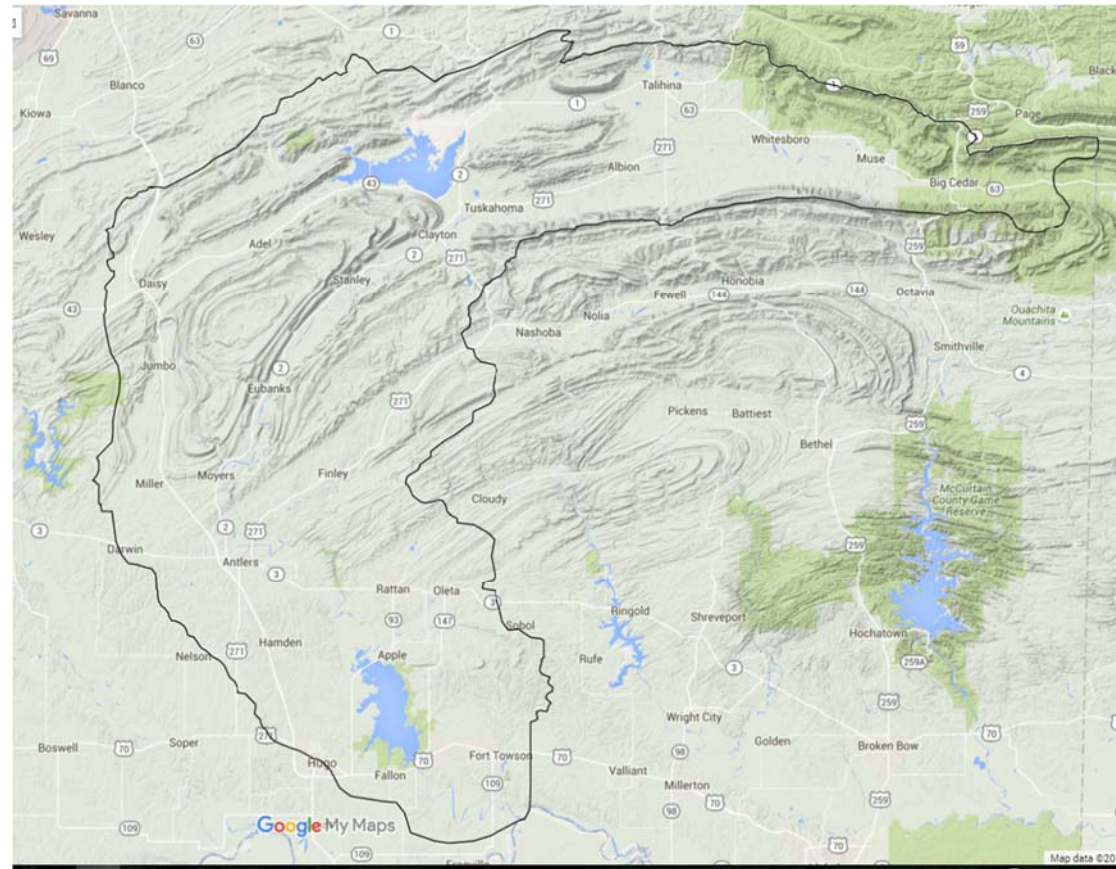
## Conducting Ethnographic Research in Southeastern Oklahoma



### Geography

The geographical focus of this ethnographic research has so far been primarily in LeFlore, Latimer, and Pushmataha Counties within the Choctaw Nation due to proximity to Lake Sardis and several small towns along the Kiamichi River. Lake Sardis, located near Clayton in the upper watershed impounds Jackfork Creek and is of particular interest to the study because of ongoing controversies over water rights, availability, allocation, and water quality. Water plays a key role in the timber, farming, and tourism industries of the region. The Kiamichi basin is covered by 65.5% forested lands while 25% is pastureland. Although annual precipitation ranges between 48 and 56 inches annually, the steep topography of the Ouachita and Kiamichi mountains results in the Kiamichi Watershed having very high runoff per square mile and therefore highly susceptible to drought conditions. This research focuses on the socio-ecological impacts of changing land and resource use patterns over time and how those changes have shaped perceptions of risk and subsistence strategies within the watershed.

### Kiamichi River



### Ethnography

While living and working in the Kiamichi Region I have spent most of my time interacting with local people through participant observation during several events, discussions, and interviews. In-depth interviews focus on key stakeholders and industries to establish context in which local ecological conditions, climate variability, and possible responses are interpreted. These observations are critical to understanding the values and activities of individuals, resource managers, community organizations, and other decision makers. The Kiamichi is an economically poor area of the state, with over 23% of the population living below the poverty line. Diversification through multiple sources of income is key to long-term economic survival in the region and agriculture is a primary means of subsistence. Discussions and observations of the past growing season suggest that the notion of surplus water in the region is not supported by the realities of a landscape that is highly susceptible to drought conditions. An overwhelming majority of the people I have spoken with so far are concerned about the future of water use and allocation in the region and having enough water in the lakes and streams to continue living and working in the Kiamichi Region.

Dr. Michael Stanton

