

Nebraska Wellhead Protection Network Meeting Notes
August 20, 2002, 11:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Nebraska Rural Water Association, Wahoo

Attending: Justin Apel, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts; Jim Barr, US Department of Agriculture Rural Development; McKenzie Barry, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (NRD); Barb Beed, AmeriCorps; Lorrie Benson, The Groundwater Foundation (TGF); Clancy Dempsey, TGF; Todd Falter, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NHHS); Russ Gierhart, Upper Big Blue NRD; Bruce Hansen, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ); Rachael Herpel, TGF; Bob Joseph, US Geological Survey; Dennis Kahl, Seward County Cooperative Extension; Deana Kelley, NDEQ; Jim Kruse, City of North Bend; Marti Link, NDEQ; William Lukash, Nebraska Rural Water Association (NRWA); Jennifer Nelson, TGF; Jerry Obrist, Lincoln Water System; Mike Onnen, Little Blue NRD; Mike Sousek, Lower Platte North NRD; Darren Thornbrugh, NDEQ; Elbert Traylor, NDEQ; Don Vogel, Nebraska Corn Growers Association; Carrie Wiese, Nemaha NRD; Chuck Wingert, Nemaha NRD; Hope Wise, NRWA; Wayne Woldt, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.

I. Welcome

II. Public Hearing Procedures for State Approved Wellhead Protection (WHP) Plans

Marty Link provided attendees with a handout describing the public hearing procedures required for state approved WHP plans. The handout also featured examples of public notices, affidavits of publication, and posted public notices. The Nebraska Legislature recently instituted these public notification procedures when they passed the Nebraska WHP Act. The group was given an opportunity to provide comments and suggestions before Marty finalizes the handout. When the handout is finalized, NDEQ will make it available to communities after they submit draft plans to them for review. The handout will probably not be available to the general public via the NDEQ web site.

III. Group Discussion

A. Flow Models

The group reviewed a handout developed by Rachael Herpel that listed available groundwater flow models, their distributors, and ordering information. The consensus was that the “ant farm” variety groundwater flow model worked better than the EnviroScape groundwater model.

The group thought that computer models may be more impressive to town boards; but the fact that they are expensive and require a great deal of staff time and expertise, not to mention data,

make them less likely to be used. Wayne Woldt is currently conducting a modeling project for a small community water system; he offered to show this model to the group at the next meeting. The group was very interested in seeing the model and hearing about the time and expertise that was needed to develop the model.

B. Wellhead Protection Network Survey Summary

Lorrie Benson handed out the results of a telephone survey she conducted with 23 group members shortly before the meeting. The group was asked to elaborate and discuss as a group the value and future of the network; especially whether or not the group should develop specific projects.

1. General Group Feedback

Bruce Hanson thought that the group provides a valuable networking opportunity for WHP professionals and helps them avoid duplication. Bruce thought that projects will emerge when needed.

Wayne Woldt recognized that in the survey responses half the group seemed to want to do something, but only if it was appropriate and worthwhile. The group as it now stands is a forum where people can discuss ideas and find potential collaborators.

Lorrie emphasized that anything the group does will be a consensus decision.

Dennis Kahl saw the group as primarily providing a networking opportunity; but if people wanted to work on special projects, they could break into small groups. Then projects could evolve when needed and the larger group could provide input to the smaller groups' projects.

Barb Beed offered that it was easier to discuss some WHP issues in smaller groups, especially when people have similar needs and experiences. The network provides an opportunity to develop partnerships and new projects.

Elbert Traylor thought that although networking was the group's original purpose, the focus of the group should be to identify what is currently lacking in WHP and take action to meet those needs. An example of this is the NRWA and NRD brochures.

Mike Onnen reminded everyone that productive activities related to the group's meetings have been done in the past; more specifically, Mike exchanged letters with Roy Simon at US EPA focusing on expanding the size of wellhead protection areas eligible for Conservation Reserve Program funding (the size is currently limited to a 2000 foot radius). Simon assured Mike that the US EPA would continue to work with USDA to "adjust federal policies and programs to increase efforts to protect water supplies." Anyone with information that would support the expansion of the WHP area eligible for CRP beyond 2000 feet were asked to send them to Simon or Wolfgang Brandner at US EPA Region VII.

Todd Falter thought that the group lacked an organization structure to conduct a group project, and that the primary value of the group was that it provided an opportunity for people to share their expertise. A project at this point would be chaotic.

Deanna Kelley commented that the group is constantly changing; it would be difficult to adopt and implement a project because of this.

Russ Gierhart liked how the group changed over time and said he got a lot of good ideas from the group.

Rachael Herpel said that one thing she'd like to do was grow the database to include more and more people interested in wellhead protection.

Deanna thought that growing the database would be counter-productive at this time.

McKenzie Barry thought that people should be allowed to volunteer for projects if they wanted.

Todd wanted to see more people bring problems or questions to the group for their input (e.g. Marty bringing the Public Notification Handout to the group for review).

Russ and Mike Sousek concurred that inviting staff from HHS or DEQ really made an impression on a community; they would recommend partnering with them on specific projects to others in the group.

2. Group Comment on Nature and Frequency of Meetings

The group generally conceded that quarterly meetings worked, but suggested that one of the quarterly meetings should be held out west, perhaps in partnership with one of the NRDs. The group talked about including folks who did not want to travel to meetings by using a phone bridge – these are available for less than \$10 through the university.

Because networking is the primary function of the group, the group decided to change its name to the Nebraska Wellhead Protection Network.¹ The group also decided that it wanted a list serve to increase the amount of networking between group members. Dennis Kahl offered to set up the list serve.

Jerry Obrist suggested that the group try meeting at 9:30 a.m. and ending with lunch and informal discussion.

The group agreed that the small groups need specific tasks or else there is no need for them to meet. The two groups' discussions were beginning to overlap.

¹ This change is reflected in the meeting notes.

C. Available and Needed WHP Materials

The group reviewed a bibliography developed by Rachael Herpel of Nebraska-specific WHP publications. Rachael also passed around a three-ring binder featuring copies of the WHP publications. Rachael pointed out that she limited the bibliography to Nebraska-specific publications, and did not include such things as the Nebraska Rural Water Association Source Water Assessment and Protection video or The Groundwater Foundation's source water assessment and protection workshop guide. The group decided that source water assessment-related publications should be included in the bibliography.

Bill Lukash commented that there is a WHP component to their video – it starts with source water assessment, but then goes into WHP. Each NRD was given a copy of the video. HHS also has one.

Imperial developed a video on well abandonment. The information may be a little outdated, but it could be included in the bibliography.

Bill reminded the group that he is working on a WHP Manual. The purpose of the manual is to give communities the same frame of reference so, when they reach a certain stage in the WHP process, they know who to call for assistance.

The general consensus of the group was that public health protection does not sell WHP, and most people do not take the time to read and absorb the information in the existing WHP publications. People would rather have someone sit down and explain the information in the publication to them.

Some members of the group thought that what WHP really needs is a marketing plan rather than another educational publication. However, some members of the group thought that Nebraskans would be more interested in the public health benefits of WHP if they only understood the risks and health impacts.

WHP's greatest selling point – prevention is cheaper than remediation and treatment. Bill asked if cost share could be an incentive for communities to implement WHP. McKenzie Barry informed the group of LPSNRD's program where they test and sample wells for some communities in their district and provide 100% cost share for abandoned well decommissioning.

IV. WHP – Prevention vs. Cure

A. Presentation

Todd Falter gave a presentation on the costs of developing a WHP plan as compared to doing some other activity to comply with drinking water standards. Todd began his presentation by saying that adopting a WHP is an option only for communities with nitrates below 15 ppm. Communities with nitrates above 15 ppm must take measures to reduce the nitrate level (e.g.

drilling a new well, connecting to another system, or installing treatment). His research clearly shows that WHP is much cheaper than the costs of remediation.

Todd's project is included on the University of Nebraska – Omaha web site as a Public Administration Capstone Project. Anyone can see the project report in its entirety at <http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwpa/project/falter.html>.

B. Group Discussion

The group talked about whether there was any research that showed that WHP did reduce the amount of contaminants reaching the aquifer. Members of the group referred to the work done by the Central Platte NRD. Parts of Central's jurisdiction have been managed since 1987 to reduce high nitrates; and since groundwater circulates fairly quickly in that region, BMPs did show more immediate results. However, Central's experience is unique to them – every location's groundwater characteristics will be different.

Someone mentioned that the best protection strategy for some communities would be to shut off the contaminated well, especially if they do not really need the water. However, if they do need the water, the community may be faced with a quantity problem.

Dennis Kahl wanted to know if there was any research showing how BMPs implemented in a WHP area protect groundwater. Soil sampling conducted by NRDs show how nitrates move through the strata; the soil samples could then show if BMPs were having an impact.

Jerry Obrist commented that Seward is faced with a situation where contamination that began 50 years ago may need another 50 to move through the soil; any BMPs that are adopted now would not have a positive impact for quite a while. However, since treatment plants last at most 20-30 years, Seward has a compelling reason to protect the WHP area – more specifically, protection now could mean a treatment plant won't be needed in 20-30 years.

The comment was made that the land acquisition monies in the SDWA State Revolving Fund are not being used and that communities do not get any points in the Intended Use Plan if they have a WHP program.

The group agreed – WHP should be required for new wells.

Jim Barr informed the group that beginning in 2004 the Farm Bill makes approximately \$1 million per state available for environmental projects in communities under 2,500. Don Vogel asserted that the timing of nitrogen applications is critical and contamination is connected more to rainfall events and not over-application. The group consensus was that over-application did occur in the past for a variety of reasons.

The group talked briefly about the need for a publication that focused on WHP and water quantity. NRDs generally address quantity issues, such as well metering. The Pumpkin Creek lawsuit and LB 108, which established a relationship between groundwater and surface water, are examples of things that could be featured in the publication.

Deanna Kelley mentioned that funding was available for large systems (not small systems) to conduct vulnerability assessments.

IV. Next Meeting Date and Time

The next meeting of the Nebraska Wellhead Protection Network has been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, November 13. The meeting will be held at the Lancaster County Extension Center (444 Cherrycreek Road in Lincoln). A specific time for the meeting has yet to be set. An agenda including the meeting date and time will be sent to network members at least one month prior to the meeting.

Please forward the names and contact information of anyone you think would be interested in attending the meeting to Rachael Herpel at 402-434-2740 or rachael@groundwater.org. Rachael will send an invitation and previous meeting notes to the prospective attendee.