

Source Water Plan Issues

by

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Completing a source water protection plan often seems to be a straight forward process, but sometimes you can run into unexpected difficulties. There are a number of obstacles that can appear as the plan progresses, and they need to be handled in the correct manner. Included in these obstacles are the accessibility to the source water protection area, the ownership of the land, the location of the area and working within tribal lands. Each of these issues brings with it a separate set of difficulties that need to be handled in a manner that considers who the people are that are involved. Individual rights of local landowners and governing bodies need to be considered when completing the requirements of a source water protection plan.

In some instances, the source water protection area is remote from the system itself and in an area that is not easily accessible by vehicles. In some cases, the wells are even located in another county as the water quality is better there. When this is the case, it is necessary to be sure you have permission to enter the area to complete an on-site contaminant source inventory. It may be necessary to complete the inventory from the nearest public road and have system personnel review it and add sources that were not visible from the road. With good aerial maps (Google Maps or ArcView) it is possible to visually locate some sources without entering the property. In the case that the well field is in a different county than the water system is in, there can be some tension between local landowners and the water system itself. Often, water rights issues may surface that need to be resolved by the proper authorities.

It is important to be transparent when working on a plan, and be open and honest concerning the work being done and the steps that need to be taken to complete the plan. Openness and honesty go a long way in smoothing the way for the completion of the project. It is essential to note that a source water protection plan is not intended to determine who has the right to the water in the area, but rather it is to insure that whoever uses water from within the source water protection area gets water that is safe to drink.

In many states, there are tribal lands that may be included in the source water protection area. Special care must be taken when working in these areas, as tribal lands are sovereign domains and must be treated diplomatically. The tribal elders should be consulted prior to entering the reservation to insure that customs and traditions of the tribe in question are not being violated and that sacred areas are treated with the respect they deserve. Since different tribes have different customs, it is imperative that the local tribe involved be consulted regarding any special treatment required while completing the plan.

If all of these hurdles are considered while completing the requirements of a source water protection plan, relationships between the water system involved and all of the other entities with a vested interest in the land and the water running through or under it can be maintained in a civil or even friendly atmosphere. Keeping all interested parties informed at all steps of the process can insure that the friction is minimized and cooperation can be maximized.