

Different Source Water Plans

by
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Not all Source Water plans are the same. There is a different approach that needs to be taken, which is dependent on what is included within the source water protection area. These differences will affect the contents of the plan, the approach being taken for implementation and how the public should be a part of the plan. These approaches include voluntary versus regulatory management, past and future protection activities and publicizing the resources available to the landowners and the residents and customers of the water system.

When considering whether to use voluntary or regulatory tools for the protection of the source of drinking water for a system, it must first be determined whether the system has the ability to regulate land uses within the protection area. If the system's wells or other water source is not within the zoning limits of that community, direct regulatory measures cannot be utilized. If the county has zoning, it is possible that they might have, or be willing to add wellhead protection overlays to the zoning regulations. This would allow the system to have input into what should be permitted uses, conditional uses or prohibited used. In many cases where counties have overlay zones, they will not enforce the requirements of those zones. The county leaves the enforcement to the entity that will benefit from the zoning, the owner of the water system. If the municipal zoning limits encompass the source water protection area, the municipality can set up their own zoning regulations to protect their future water source. Care must be taken to include non-residents in the zoning process so as not to be over regulating landowners who are not represented on the zoning board.

When writing a source water protection plan, past activities are included to show the resolve of the system to be proactive in the process. The person completing the plan likely is unaware of any past activities related to this protection, so it is the responsibility of the system personnel to inform them of the activities. There are also other events that can held in the area to keep the public focused on the protection of their water. These activities can include a "test you water" for nitrates event or Water Week poster events. Getting the school and other interested community members involved in the planning of these types of activities can spark public interest in the plan.

There are also a number of organizations that offer educational and financial assistance for implementing source water plans. NRDs and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have many cost share programs that can assist systems in protecting their future source of drinking water. Decommissioning abandoned wells, planting and maintaining buffer zones and the Conservation Reserve Program are some of the resources that are available. The UNL Extension service also has a number of informational brochures that can assist homeowners in applying the correct amounts of fertilizers and planting gardens with native plants that require less watering.

Although there are people willing to assist in the compiling s source water protection plan for a system, it is important that the citizens and system personnel take an active part in producing the plan for the system. Landowners who are not municipal residents should also be included in the preparation of the plan. This will help to avoid hurt feelings and conflict during the preparation and implementation of the plan.