

Wellhead Protection Area Maps

by Barney Whatley
Source Water Specialist

The 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments established a strong new emphasis on preventing contamination problems through source water protection and enhanced water system management. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality was given the authority “to develop information which enables Public Water Supply owners, consumers, and others to initiate and/or promote actions to protect their drinking water sources,” also called a Source Water Assessment. All Public Water Suppliers should have received this information by May of 2003. The Source Water Assessment can be used to start or be incorporated into a Wellhead Protection Program. The Source Water Assessment included maps of the area considered to be the future source for the system’s drinking water for the next twenty years. These maps have been updated on occasion, and DEQ will update the maps upon request or if the system has added new wells or other changes that would invalidate the original maps.

When developing a source water protection plan or a wellhead protection plan, the system is not required to use the NDEQ provided maps, but may change them if there is a compelling reason to do so. If land ownership has changed, it is often helpful to draw the map along ownership boundaries, section lines or river locations. It is acceptable to make these changes, as long as the newly delineated area contains all of the land within the 20-year time of travel of all of the system’s wells. Since all landowners within the wellhead protection area should be involved in the development of the plan, it is important to have accurate maps and current data on the ownership of the land within the protection area.

If a single entity (person or company) owns a small piece of land within the protection area’s boundaries, but not in the 20-year time of travel for any of the system wells, it might be advantageous to remove that land from the protection area to reduce the possibility of complaints from persons not directly affected by the wellhead protection plan. Systems need to keep in mind that the development of the plan needs to involve all of the public, and removing any land within the protection area does not limit the owner’s right to voice any concerns they have at any public hearings held concerning the plan.

Reducing the number of landowners directly affected by wellhead planning can be very beneficial, but the transparency of the process is very important. All voices should be given a chance to be heard regarding any actions or programs being contemplated by any public entity. The system does not want to be seen as doing things behind the backs of anyone in or near the project, as that makes it seem that they are hiding something from the public. Always be open and respectful of any opinions or comments received regarding the wellhead protection process and the planning will be smoother and the results will be more widely accepted.