

## Funding Source Water Projects by Barney Whatley, Source Water Specialist

After a system completes a source water protection plan, there are usually several “Action Items” that the system would like to see implemented. One of the main roadblocks many small systems seem to run into is finding a source of funding for these projects. There are many different sources of funding available for projects to protect the quality of groundwater. Which source would work best will depend on the size and scope of the project to be completed, the amount of funding that will be required and the ability of the system to produce any matching funds that might be required.

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) has several programs available to assist systems in funding projects to protect their source of drinking water. Source Water Protection Grants are available for systems serving less than 10,000 people and who can show a financial hardship that prevents them from borrowing the money commercially. The application for these grants is usually issued in late winter or early spring of each year. There is a 10% match requirement for this funding.

Non-Point Source Water Quality Grants are available under Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act in five different categories. Local sponsors of eligible projects can apply for the grants for the prevention or abatement of non-point source water pollution. There is a requirement for a 40% match with non-federal funds for this grant, and other requirements that must be met.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has several programs to help agricultural producers to make and maintain conservation improvements on their land. The community can partner with agricultural producers within the source water protection area to apply for funding that will improve conservation and protect the community’s source of drinking water.

Local NRDs have programs to cost share with local landowners for many different projects. One very important program funded by local NRDs is the decommissioning of abandoned and unused wells. Many NRDs offer to fund up to 75% of the total cost of decommissioning wells that are no longer being used. The actual work must be done by a licensed well driller. Communities that are very concerned with abandoned wells within their source water protection area could budget a set amount of money each year to either pay the landowner’s share of the project, or at least a portion of the cost share to make the project more appealing to the landowner. The total cost for each well will vary depending on the diameter of the well and the depth. Determining an average cost for decommissioning wells within the source water protection area will help the community to decide the number of wells they would be able to assist in decommissioning per year.

By investigating these funding options and partnering with landowners within the source water protection area, communities can take positive steps to insure they have a safe supply of drinking water for future generations.