

## **Community Management Planning**

By

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Where does the time go? It is hard to believe it has been a year since I started with Nebraska Rural Water Association! This years Spring Rural Water Conference was my only my second. No longer did I get away with saying "I'm not sure about that.... this is my first conference." This year I actually had some responsibility (scary I know).

I was glad to see so many operators able to attend the conference. The variety of classes kept the agenda very interesting. We offered the normal backflow classes and a new computer class. The class I thought I would write about is "**When and How of Wellhead Protection in Nebraska**". This class was on Wednesday of the Conference and Ms. Rachael Herpel, from The Groundwater Foundation, facilitated this class. The Groundwater Foundation encourages a community based approach to management planning for source water protection. Since I have been working on a similar program for the past year, I was asked to speak on a panel and discuss some of the issues a town may face when doing a Wellhead Protection project. For those of you that could not make it to the Conference, I thought I would go over some questions asked during the session and their answers. Remember, there is more than one right answer; this is the approach I took.

### **When is the best time for communities to plan and implement wellhead protection activities?**

The best time to start a plan is usually in the winter months. This is a good time to get people together. For instance, farming activities have usually slowed down, and farmers will be able to attend meetings. Also, you usually do not have to compete with nice weather, the extra daylight, and all the other exciting things about spring and summer. When planning meetings, evenings usually work the best. By planning in the winter you can get started thinking about management projects for the coming year. Since some of the grants for funding potential projects come up during the late spring and fall, starting in the winter leaves plenty of time to get grant proposals written and information submitted after the planning process is finished. Ideally planning should be completed sometime in March or before the planting season starts. Otherwise you might find yourself waiting another whole year before implementation can take place.

### **What is the best approach to wellhead protection?**

I believe the best approach to wellhead protection is for efforts to be community-based. The citizens of a community must understand that it is their water and no one has greater incentive to protect it. Even if a community-based effort is started and you are small in numbers, one thing to remember is not how many people you have, but what you get accomplished. Persistence of the group will pay off in the long run, large or small. It is surprising how many people will join in after they start to see progress. So

take that group, no matter how small, and start planning for the protection of your source water.

### **What makes a wellhead protection program successful?**

A successful program has a strong emphasis on the future – getting projects implemented and completed, and having new goals set each year of the project. Another necessity is usually funding. This can often be obtained through grants to implement your project. There are many different ways to measure success. But it is difficult to measure success without goals. Community-planning groups should set goals early in the process. If every community set goals to complete a local wellhead protection plan after reading this article, then I would say this was a successful article! If you have any questions about starting a community-based management program for your source water, I would be glad to answer them to the best of my ability.