

Wellhead Protection Spotlight

By Mike Lucas, Sourcewater Specialist

This issue I would like to feature two neighboring communities in the “Wellhead Protection Spotlight.” They are 30 minutes apart on Highway #2 in western Nebraska and are both completing their wellhead protection area management programs.

The Village of Thedford, population 174, is the county seat of Thomas County and is located on the north bank of the Middle Loup River in the sandhills area of Nebraska. Thedford is near the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands which contains the largest human-planted forest in the United States. It was created in 1902 by Charles E. Bessey as an experiment to see if forests could be created in the treeless areas of the Great Plains for use as a national timber reserve.



The Bessey Ranger District including the tree nursery carries his name today.

The Thedford water system has three wells serving 127 services with the largest customer being the Thedford High School. Nitrate concentrations in the drinking water have been relatively low but have shown some increasing levels over the last 10 years. They are monitored closely.

The Village of Mullen, population 491, is the Hooker County seat and is also located in the sandhills cattle country of Nebraska. Land use in Mullen’s wellhead protection area is primarily native tall grass

prairie with no cultivated cropland. Mullen is the home of two world class golf courses, the Dismal River Club designed by Jack Nicklaus and the Sandhills Golf Course designed by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore.



Mullen has 688 metered service connections served by four groundwater wells. There is 250,000 gallons of water storage in an elevated storage tank. An engineering study is currently investigating what distribution system upgrades are needed to improve system flows and pressures. The school is the single largest consumer.

NOTE: These two neighbors recently came even closer together during the time of need of one of the communities. The community of Thedford and the Nebraska Rural Water Association lost a member of our mutual work family when Anthony “Tony” Spresser, the water/wastewater operator for the Village of Thedford, passed away on May 12, 2011. He had begun faithfully serving his community on May 7, 1985. The Village of Mullen Utility Superintendent, Wes Skillings, had previously volunteered to be the back-up operator for his neighboring community. Wes and the Village of Mullen immediately and unselfishly stepped forward to provide assistance.

Over the years I’ve seen isolated islands of service become communities banding together to assist each other. No one community is more important than another regardless of population or geographic location. Communities jointly provide safety training for their employees and do joint purchasing. They share costs saving their citizens money. Some examples are communities joining the Nebraska Rural Water Association for technical support and training and the League of Nebraska Municipalities for a strong legislative voice, training and insurance. Communities have joined together to address solid waste needs along with electric power and natural gas energy supplies. Working together allows the communities to provide a higher level of service to their citizens while saving them money. Disasters, such as floods and severe storm damage, are addressed with mutual aid agreements and statewide interlocal agreements, such as Nebraska WARN. In times of need the smallest are working hand in hand with the largest. Many times communities volunteer assistance before a request for help is even sent out. Everyone benefits when these unselfish, forward thinking communities work together. It’s heartwarming to see it all come together.