



Meeting Notes
Tuesday, May 16, 2006, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality Van Dorn Facility, Lincoln

Present

Daryl Andersen, Little Blue Natural Resources District (NRD); Jill Baker, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department; Deana Barger, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ); Sid Bartels, Upper Republican NRD; Marcy Bauer, Public Health Solutions, Inc.; Dick Ehrman, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD); Russ Gierhart, Upper Big Blue NRD; Randy Gunn, South Central Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development; Bruce Hanson, NDEQ; Rachael Herpel, The Groundwater Foundation (TGF); Jan Hynstrom, University of Nebraska Extension; John Kieth, Lincoln Water System; Marlin Kliewer, Gage County Zoning; Marty Link, NDEQ; Zoe McManaman, TGF; David Meisbach, NDEQ; Jason Moudry, Upper Niobrara White NRD; Jamie Oltman, TGF; Craig Romary, Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA); Richard Sanne; Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Greg Steele, USGS Nebraska Water Science Center; Phil Steinkamp, Upper Elkhorn NRD East Branch Verdigris Creek Project; Don Vogel, Nebraska Corn Growers; Barney Whatley, Nebraska Rural Water Association

I. Welcome and Introductions

Rachael Herpel welcomed meeting participants and passed around a sign up sheet for verification/update of contact information. Herpel gave a special welcome to first-time WHPN meeting attendees Jill Baker and Phil Steinkamp. Herpel then asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Jan Hynstrom informed the group that a new workshop called “Healthy Water, Healthy People” will be held June 13-15 at the Lied Lodge and Conference Center in Nebraska City. Educators of 9th and 10th grade students are invited to attend; they will receive copies of the “Healthy Water, Healthy People” water quality education guide and one of two testing kits – one for watersheds and one for drinking water – valued at \$70. The workshop is free, however a \$30 deposit must be submitted to hold a spot at the workshop; the \$30 will be returned. For more information, visit <http://www.esu8.org/staffdevelopment/healthyWater.pdf>.

Dick Ehrman informed the group that the state Envirothon winners were from Wauneta-Palisade. A wellhead/source water protection element has been added to the event. NRDs are working to get more high schools involved in the Envirothon program. For more information, visit the Nebraska Envirothon website at <http://www.nrdnet.org/envirothon/index.htm> or the National Envirothon website at <http://www.envirothon.org/index.php>.

Bruce Hanson is still working to update wellhead protection area maps and review wellhead protection plans. The most recent list of state-approved wellhead protection plans is attached.

Marty Link informed the group that the 2005 Nebraska Groundwater Quality and Surface Quality Monitoring Reports are available via NDEQ's website - <http://www.ndeq.state.ne.us/>. Link also gave a recap of the wellhead protection information session for state senators held at the state capitol on January 31. She suggested that next year wellhead protection efforts be combined with those of the Nebraska Well Drillers Association; they held an information event for state senators at the capitol on March 14 (during Groundwater Awareness Week).

John Keith informed the group that he was currently monitoring atrazine levels in the Lower Platte River; a spring "spike" normally occurs, and when levels go above the drinking water standard (3 ppb), the Lincoln Water System shuts off their wells. So far atrazine levels have stayed below 3 ppb.

David Meisbach informed the group that NDEQ was doing a study in the Fremont area to investigate whether toxic algae is having any negative impact on groundwater. Toxins emitted by the algae do have the potential to enter groundwater, but it is unknown at this time whether toxins have done so. Meisbach also informed the group that the 51st Annual Midwest Ground Water Conference will be held in Lincoln November 7-9. For more information visit the conference website at <http://snr.unl.edu/midwest/>.

Marcy Bauer informed the group that they were working on a storm drain stenciling project and planned to do a "Test Your Well" event with Doane College students.

II. Nebraska Wellhead Protection Program Update

As of June 1, a total of 64 wellhead protection plans had been approved by NDEQ; this is seven more since the last time the group met. Quite a few more are under consideration.

NDEQ's Deana Barger is being trained on to how to draw wellhead protection area maps. Daryl Andersen suggested NDEQ make an effort to update the presence/absence of railroad tracks — many do not exist anymore and are still included on the maps. Russ Gierhart added he would like to know how many acres in his district are included in wellhead protection areas; the district would use the information to budget for cost share.

NDEQ's grant for additional cost share monies for well abandonment has been approved. NDEQ prefers to work with towns; towns should have a written agreement with a well driller to complete the work. If anyone has additional questions, they should contact Brad Routt via e-

mail at Brad.Routt@ndeq.state.ne.us. A sample contract can be e-mailed as .pdf file to anyone who is interested.

A tour focusing on Vegetative Treatment Systems for Feedlots and other Best Management Practices for Small Livestock Operations will be held on June 15. For more information about the tour or to register, go to <http://afo.unl.edu>.

Bruce Hanson mentioned that US EPA has become discontented with the speed at which communities under an Administrative Order for nitrate are returning to compliance. They have said the communities' contingency plans are not adequate and wellhead protection plans are not being implemented. Communities in trouble or who are on the verge of being trouble feature "contact NHHS as the cornerstone of their contingency plan," rather than detailed plans of where they will go for future water supplies (EPA would like communities to refer to a specific geographic region) and funding. Link clarified that communities' wellhead protection plans are approved when they follow a certain process to develop the plan; there is no hard and fast judgment on the content of the plan or how or whether it will be implemented.

Herpel asked what the nitrate level trends were in Nebraska. Dick Ehrman commented that it really depends on the region and, in general, nitrate levels are increasing or decreasing in one-third to one-fourth of wells; nitrate levels are staying about the same in half the wells. An in-depth study was done for Phelps County. Data has been collected since 1970; it showed both increases and decreases. Russ Gierhart commented that in any area where center pivots are used, nitrate levels are generally staying the same. Nitrate problems are generally associated with flood irrigation. Also, as nitrogen costs go up, the cost of irrigating necessarily goes up; increased nitrogen costs may be the best approach to combating nitrate contamination – it will soon be too expensive to waste any.

Jason Moudry commented that he and Chadron water operator Steve Boeselager met with the Dawes County Commissioners about adding BMP requirement to their existing wellhead protection ordinance. Chadron was the first community in the county to have a wellhead protection plan; the county adopted Chadron's plan language for their ordinance. The commissioners would now like the ordinance to apply to all the wellhead protection areas in the county.

Daryl Andersen is working with the Village of Byron, Nebraska on their wellhead protection plan. They are in a unique situation in that their wellhead protection area is in Kansas. Andersen is also working with the Village of Deweese to complete their wellhead protection plan. The town was hesitant to put the wellhead protection plan document out for review because there was no real public place to put it and the fear it may be stolen. Link emphasized that the important thing is to make the plan available to the public for their review. Having the plan available for as little as an hour a week or by appointment is good enough.

III. Preventing Pathogenic Contamination of Drinking Water Sources

Herpel described a project currently being implemented by The Groundwater Foundation that is designed to develop and field test a process to educate communities on how to prevent pathogens

from entering drinking water sources. The project combines information from local and national experts and agencies with The Groundwater Foundation's planning assistance to help communities implement protection strategies. Herpel commented that the project was inspired by the Groundwater Rule, but is not an official Groundwater Rule project. The project does test the hypothesis of whether local leaders are more likely to take action to confront a water issue with potentially acute consequences (i.e. immediate gastrointestinal illness) rather than chronic consequences (i.e. increased rates of cancer or other diseases).

To date, The Groundwater Foundation has held two workshops as part of this project; one in Chadron, Nebraska in cooperation with the Upper Niobrara White Natural Resources District on April 25, 2006 and the other in Gretna, Nebraska in cooperation with the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance on May 25, 2006. Both workshops included information on common waterborne pathogens and outbreaks in recent history, contamination prevention strategies, and case studies of contamination prevention and treatment presented by state and local government professionals, pathogen experts and Groundwater Foundation staff. The workshops also included planning time during which Foundation staff facilitated the planning of contamination prevention activities by workshop attendees. Additional pathogen workshops will be held in Kansas, Missouri, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

Herpel commented that pre and post surveys/tests were administered as part of the workshop. Results show that attendees got an average of 3 questions wrong on the pre survey and zero to one question wrong on the post survey. Jason Moudry, host of the Chadron workshop, commented that the workshop did help to get the ball rolling on wellhead protection plan development. Deana Barger, who spoke at both the Chadron and Gretna workshops, commented that the material seemed to be well received by those who attended. For more information about the project, visit The Groundwater Foundation's website at <http://www.groundwater.org/pe/pathogens/pathogen.html>.

IV. Tour of NDEQ Facility

Meeting attendees went on a tour of the NDEQ's Van Dorn Facility. The facility houses much of NDEQ's field equipment and is capable of becoming an emergency response headquarters, if need be. The facility also includes a lab where a variety of water quality tests are conducted.

V. Wrap-Up – Next Meeting

David Miesbach reminded the group that the Midwest Groundwater Conference, "Convergence of Rural and Urban Groundwater Issues," is being held in Lincoln November 7-9. The conference is organized by the University of Nebraska – Lincoln School of Natural Resources, Conservation and Survey Division, and Water Sciences Laboratory, along with the Nebraska Well Drillers Association, Nebraska Health and Human Services System, NDEQ, NARD, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, and the US Geological Survey Nebraska Water Science Center. For more information visit the conference website at <http://snr.unl.edu/midwest/>.

Herpel mentioned that The Groundwater Foundation's Annual Conference has been scheduled for November 1-3 in East Lansing, Michigan. One day of the conference will focus on pathogens and serve as a finale to the pathogen project; the other day will focus on Groundwater Guardian. Herpel also mentioned that a considerable part of the pathogen project is workshop attendee follow-up to see what has been accomplished as a result of attending the workshop.

Herpel asked the group about ideas for future meetings. Marcy Bauer suggested featuring the topic of pharmaceuticals and personal care product waste. Herpel suggested conducting a meeting at the Ferguson House that focused on well abandonment. This meeting could be scheduled when the NRD legislative conference was in town. Dick Ehrman added that the NRDs' annual conference would be held in September in Kearney; the legislative conference would be held in January in Lincoln. Deana Barger commented that a field trip featuring a live well abandonment would be a good addition to the meeting.

Phil Steinkamp asked the other NRDs at the meeting if they have had trouble getting folks to properly decommission their abandoned wells. He has had to twist arms to get people, especially farmers, to do it. Jason Moudry commented that with cost share most well owners are willing to do it. Sid Bartels commented that with their well moratorium it is required. Russ Gierhart commented that his district is going to do more education and provide more information on it. His district intends to canvass the area – going so far as to drive through a township – and then send out letters to landowners suspected of having an abandoned well on their property. Dick Ehrman commented that the fact that abandoned wells are illegal is not a strong motivator for people; it does catch the attention of people who would like to sell their property – they have to get the well properly decommissioned before they move.

Gierhart commented that sometimes it is difficult to find a well driller to do the work of decommissioning a well – it is not a good money-maker for them. Steinkamp agreed by saying many well drillers can make more money drilling other wells, so it is not at the top of their lists to do. Ehrman commented that smaller well drilling outfits might like that kind of work; more business no matter what type is additional business.

Bruce Hanson suggested the next meeting feature topics that are being presented at the Midwest Groundwater Conference. Presenting the information to the NE WHPN would be good practice for those presenting.

Herpel asked if there was any interest in doing another meeting at the capitol in January or March. Ehrman reminded the group that the NARD Legislative Conference is held on the last Monday and Tuesday of January. Wellhead protection and the NE WHPN could potentially get on the NARD agenda. It would be a good opportunity to educate new managers.

Marty Link requested that we explore a collaboration with the Well Drillers Association, who held an event at the capitol during Groundwater Awareness Week in March.

Deana Barger suggested presenting to the Utilities Section of the League of Municipalities at their annual conference. They may be especially interested in the WAMA (wellhead area management assistance) project.

Herpel reminded the group to think about who needed to be added to the NE WHPN contact list. In the past planning and zoning directors and health department officials had been added. Ehrman suggested adding well drillers. Other suggestions were the Midwest Assistance Program and the League of Municipalities. All had been on the email list at one point, but might have been taken off when email addresses did not work; Herpel will check what the current status of these organizations. Herpel reminded attendees they are free to pass on NE WHPN information and notices to anyone they think would be interested.

Craig Romary informed the group that the NDA Pesticides Program (<http://www.agr.ne.gov/division/bpi/pes/pest1.htm>) has a Pesticide and Noxious Weed Newsletter for commercial and noncommercial pesticide applicators, but anyone can sign up to get it. More information about this newsletter can be accessed directly at <http://www.agr.ne.gov/division/bpi/pstnx/news.htm>. Past issues of the newsletter are available here, and anyone interested in receiving an electronic notification of future issues can simply follow the directions for subscribing. The NDA website (<http://www.agr.ne.gov/division/bpi/pes/labels.htm>) also features Pesticide Label Lists for Specific Use Requirements that is intended to protect surface and groundwater quality. Setbacks described on the labels are enforced by NDA - not optional recommended or cautionary notices. Comments about the information presented on the NDA website are appreciated; please send your comments directly to Craig Romary at cromary@agr.ne.gov.

Dick Ehrman informed the group that the Annual Water and Natural Resources Tour will be held July 18-20 and will feature the Missouri River Basin and northeast Nebraska. Also the 2006 National CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) Forum will be held in Lincoln August 14-17 at The Cornhusker. For more information or to register for this prestigious national event, visit <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/crep/crep.htm>.

Greg Steele informed the group that USGS just published two new circulars – they are:

- USGS Circular 1291, Pesticides in the Nation's Streams and Ground Water, 1992-2001 (<http://ca.water.usgs.gov/pnsp/pubs/circ1291/>)
- USGS Circular 1292, Volatile Organic Compounds in the Nation's Ground Water and Drinking-Water Supply Wells
http://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/vocs/national_assessment/

Another circular is due out later this year that focuses on nutrients. All USGS circulars are available via the USGS website - <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/circ/>. Anyone can get a hard copy of a circular for free and download the circular from the website.

Jan Hynstrom informed the group that a septic system pump and inspection demonstration will be held May 31 near Prague. The demonstration is free and open to the public.

Herpel concluded the meeting by thanking NDEQ for the use of the meeting room – it worked very well – and for the tour of the facility. Other groups were reminded they could easily reserve the meeting space. A subsequent NE WHPN meeting was not scheduled – stay tuned for future meeting notices.