



Meeting Notes

**Monday, March 6, 2006, 1:30 p.m.-4:00 p.m.
Kearney Holiday Inn, Kearney, Nebraska**

Attending: Daryl Andersen, Little Blue Natural Resources District (NRD); Deana Barger, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ); Sid Bartels, Upper Republican NRD; Steve Bartels, Nemaha NRD; Mark Graf, Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department; Bruce Hanson, NDEQ; Rachael Herpel, The Groundwater Foundation; Gerald Huntwork, Frontier & Hayes County Zoning Administration; Skip Kahler, Lower Elkhorn NRD; Marlin Kliewer, Gage County Zoning Administrator; Marty Link, NDEQ; Robert Merrigan, Middle Republican NRD; David Miesbach, NDEQ; Jason Moudry, Upper Niobrara-White NRD; Mike Murphy, Lower Elkhorn NRD; Tyler Napestek, Upper Elkhorn NRD; Charlie Pierce, Nemaha NRD; Ralph Pulte, Nebraska Health and Human Services; Marlene Rasmussen, Litchfield; Craig Romary, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Carl Roland, North Platte NRD; Kathryn Russell, Kearney County; Greg Steele, United States Geological Survey; Jackie Stumpff, NDEQ; Ryan Tompkins, Middle Niobrara NRD; Elbert Traylor, NDEQ; Barney Whatley, Nebraska Rural Water Association (NRWA); Marcia White, University of Nebraska Rural Initiative; Chuck Wingert, Nemaha NRD; Rick Wozniak, Lower Elkhorn NRD.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Rachael Herpel welcomed attendees to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves. This meeting was scheduled immediately prior to the Annual NRD Water Programs meeting allowing a number of NRD staff were able to attend. For some NRD staff, this was their first NE WHPN meeting.

Marty Link debriefed the group about the January 31st information session at the state capitol. The session was basically “Groundwater and Wellhead Protection 101” for the state senators. Emphasis was placed on talking to the senators and their staffs one-on-one, rather than through formal presentations. A PowerPoint presentation featuring wellhead protection (WHP) area maps ran continuously during the session. As part of WHP Awareness Week at the capitol, TGF, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, Lincoln Water Conservation Task Force, NDEQ, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Rural Water Association, South Platte NRD, and University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension set up displays in the downstairs capitol rotunda. Senators and visitors were able to see the displays all week.

II. Nebraska WHP Program Update – Round Robin

Daryl Andersen gave an overview of the WHP work being done by the City of Edgar in cooperation with himself and Judy Petersen of Grants and More. Edgar is under an administrative order for nitrate. They have a state-approved WHP plan and are now working to implement the plan and reduce the amount of nitrate in the WHP area.

NDEQ approached the City of Edgar with the idea of conducting a pilot which would adapt the watershed management planning process for wellhead area management. As part of this pilot, Edgar held public meetings, developed a stakeholder committee, and prepared a WHP area management plan. To implement the plan, Edgar has applied for two grants – one from NDEQ and one from the Nebraska Environmental Trust; both have been tentatively approved.

Protection activities include buying two center pivot irrigation systems and adopting no-till farming practices; both will be accomplished through a 75% cost share payment (the city will provide the remaining 25%). These farms will essentially be managed by a crop consultant, the NRD, and the extension service to guarantee that the amount of nitrate being leached into the ground will be reduced if not eliminated. Other activities have included holding a lawn care seminar and may include constructing wetlands to remediate nitrate-heavy groundwater and managing a compost pile to provide organic fertilizer for the community. If all continues to go as well as this pilot has gone so far, Edgar's experience will serve as a model for future nonpoint source/WHP area management projects in Nebraska.

On March 21st Roy Spalding will present the results of vadose zone testing conducted for Edgar's WHP area. Andersen said this whole area of the Little Blue NRD is high in nitrate and, as a result, has been designated as a Phase II Groundwater Management Area. Area farmers do have a history of working with the NRD, extension, and crop consultants. Craig Romary asked if a pesticide incentive is included in the plan, particularly because no-till can generate pesticide problems. Andersen said the use of pesticides would be managed. Jackie Stumpff noted that Edgar has refused to install meters as part of their public water system, thus limiting their access to certain federal grants.

Andersen also commented that he is working with Hebron and three other communities to develop and adopt WHP plans.

Ralph Pulte informed the group that soil samples from two systems under an administrative order for nitrate show that nitrate levels are decreasing at the three foot level. This shows that communities can reverse the trend of nitrate contamination and can use WHP as a compliance tool to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act nitrate standard. Pulte also noted that he had been sitting in on NRCS's Invasive Plant Committee meetings. The committee's work is still in the early stages. Pulte commented that he got the impression that this committee knew nothing about WHP and could benefit from a briefing; Marty Link offered to conduct a briefing. Pulte also informed the group that the number of public water systems in Nebraska under an administrative order to comply with the nitrate standard had dropped to fifteen. This drop is mostly due to systems drilling new wells or putting in treatment.

Deana Barger announced that the 2006 Source Water Protection (SWP) Request for Proposals (RFP) is available. Over \$200,000 is available for SWP projects.

Barney Whatley informed the group that the NRWA received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region VII that makes equipment available to conduct nitrate tests, particularly for samples taken from private wells, and educate the public about groundwater. Three HACH test kits, three groundwater flow models, and three GPS units are available.

Daryl Andersen informed the group that the Adams County Zoning Board passed a WHP overlay district, but the county commission has yet to adopt or implement it. This “going back and forth” has held up the City of Juniata’s efforts to develop and implement a WHP plan. Marlin Kliewer commented that with counties the question often comes down to who will do what when and who will pay for it.

David Miesbach briefed the group on the latest activity going on in McCook. They are building a \$15-16 million ionic exchange treatment plant; however, they will also need to drill a \$1 million deep well to dispose of the waste generated by the plant. If all goes through as planned (and it must because they have no other option), McCook would be the first municipality in Nebraska to treat and dispose of waste in a deep well. The well would inject wastewater at 100 gallons per minute. Miesbach noted that the quality of the wastewater would be greater than that of the water already in the aquifer in which the wastewater would be injected; in other words, this wastewater could actually serve to improve the quality of the water in this aquifer.

Chuck Wingert informed the group that Auburn is interested in well abandonment; however the community is now focused on the prospect of an ethanol plant being built nearby. This plant could have a major impact on water use in this area.

Charlie Pierce updated the group about Tecumseh’s efforts to adopt WHP. Tecumseh had been waiting for Johnson County to pass their zoning regulations. Once the county did this, Tecumseh decided they would drill a new well. Now they are waiting to finalize their WHP plan so it may include the new well. Pierce is also working on contaminant source inventories for Talmage and Johnson County Rural Water District #1.

Marlin Kliewer informed the group that Beatrice may not do a WHP plan; they still may do WHP activities.

Gerald Huntwork informed the group that in Frontier County Curtis is working on a WHP plan.

Jason Moudry informed the group that Hemingford’s town board has voted in favor of moving forward on their WHP plan. Chadron is interested in using county zoning to implement WHP. Moudry is also planning to conduct a contaminant source inventory for Hay Springs.

Mark Graf informed the group that, according to the Nebraska Environmental Trust 2006 Preliminary Rank Order List, the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department will get funding to conduct private well testing for arsenic, nitrate, and uranium and to conduct private well

owner education. Graf also commented that Arapahoe could use a new WHP area map from NDEQ; the community does not have confidence in their current map. Arapahoe has done a lot of work to secure a stable water supply, including purchasing irrigated agricultural land and drilling 23 test wells, which the Lower Republican NRD now uses for monitoring.

Bruce Hanson distributed copies of the latest list of communities with approved WHP plans; there are 61. Hanson also made available a list of communities with WHP plans that have been submitted and are under review. Hanson commented that three WHP area maps are currently being refined; they are for Prosser, Pierce, and Geneva. NDEQ staff just finished refining Western's map.

Marlene Rasmussen informed the group that Litchfield has a new water operator, Mike Royle, who may be interested in doing WHP.

Elbert Traylor informed the group that he is working on a Five Year Plan for Nebraska's Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program and accepting suggestions on how to improve the program. Traylor informed the group that Well Head Area Management Assistance (WHAMA) grants are available to those NRDs interested in promoting WHP in their area. NRDs may receive up to five years of funding to initiate a WHP program for their district. The Nemaha NRD, Upper Big Blue NRD, Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Loup NRD, and Upper Niobrara White NRD have all received WHAMA grants. Traylor also informed the group that the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department finalized a contract with TGF to develop materials that may be used to promote and facilitate "Test Your Well" events nationally.

III. Community Assessment in Nebraska

Marcia White, Community/International Development Specialist with the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative, presented information on a new community assessment approach being adapted for use in Nebraska. Communities who go through the assessment process and identify water supply as an issue may be "primed" and much more likely to prepare and implement a WHP plan. Resources teams may also suggest WHP in their final reports to communities.

For more information, please view her PowerPoint presentation available on the NE WHPN web page (<http://www.groundwater.org/pe/newhp.html>) or contact White directly at 402-472-7252 or mwhite2@unl.edu.

IV. Next Meeting

The next NE WHPN meeting will be held some time in May at the NDEQ facility located at the corner of 8th and Van Dorn streets in Lincoln. Information about this meeting will be made available when the agenda and logistics are finalized.