

Regional Source Water Protection: Utilizing an Interagency Approach

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It is often the case that watersheds and major aquifers (primary and principle) that serve as public water supplies cross a number of local, county and sometimes state boundaries. Because of these circumstances, effective regional water supply protection requires a multitude of agencies working together. This management method is currently being promoted by NYSDEC for the state's large drainage basins under the Unified Watershed Assessment and Watershed Protection and Restoration Program. Outside of NYSDEC's efforts, there have been many nongovernmental organizations that have used this approach and have completed comprehensive watershed management plans (i.e. Finger Lakes). This same approach can be used for slightly smaller scaled drinking water protection projects.

As I have said before, successful regional source water protection programs require a number of steps to effectively address water quality concerns. The process starts by identifying issues/problems within the respective drinking water supply protection area. Once this has been accomplished, the next step is to get local agencies and departments involved that have regulatory authority, technical expertise or a vested interest in participating in a source water protection program. When the core group of participating partners has been identified and organized, strategies need to be developed to address the identified water quality issues. Implementing strategies by working through the participating partners is the last, and most difficult step. This is the step where many well intended programs lose momentum and falter.

In my experience, as long as there is municipal support, regional source water protection programs either thrive, or stumble, based on the individuals that are designated to help implement the identified water quality strategies. Although there is a difference with localities, typically there are a number of local agencies that should be involved. Local agencies that I have found to be crucial participants (outside of the municipal representatives) are county soil and water conservation districts, local health departments,

and cooperative extension offices. These agencies and departments often have the local insight and experience dealing with the different facets of water quality issues. These agencies also often have relationships with other nongovernmental local organizations that may assist with community-wide education efforts. Other local agencies that may be an asset as a core group member, or of assistance, are county planning departments and nongovernmental organizations (citizen lake groups, local conservation chapters, etc.). Many counties already have organized groups (Water Quality Coordinating Committees and Environmental Management Councils) that meet on a regular basis to discuss water quality issues. These groups provide a logical forum to discuss source water protection initiatives, cooperative strategies, and funding opportunities.

Regional programs (programs covering multiple counties/ region) can also provide support in regional source water protection programs. Examples of these agencies are, Regional Planning and Development Councils and Resource Conservation and Development Programs, Regional Commissions. These entities can either provide direct assistance or help deal with specific issues related to water quality protection. This is especially true in the case of Regional Planning and Development Councils where the majority of these councils have received funding at one point to complete source water protection projects.

This article has hopefully provided information on common agencies and groups that can provide input and assistance when putting together a regional source water protection plan/ program. The agencies mentioned above should be viewed as technical resources that you as water suppliers can access. It must be noted that this has been a simple cross section of common agencies found at the county and/or regional level. There are many other organizations (especially nongovernmental) located throughout the state that could potentially play an important role in a source water protection project. If you have any questions regarding the contents of this article, please do not hesitate to contact me for assistance. I have provided some basic contact information on agencies mentioned in this article:

Agency Name	Website
New York State County Soil and Water Conservation Districts	http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/soilwater/homepage.html
New York State County Cooperative Extension Offices	http://cce.cornell.edu/local_offices.cfm
New York State Regional Councils	http://www.cdrpc.org/nysarc.html
New York Resource Conservation and Development Program	http://www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/index.html