Laying the Foundation for Partnerships Between Water Utilities and Agriculture for Source Water Protection

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Southwest Section
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Overview

• Background
• AWWA’s Initiative
• Example agricultural conservation projects
• Pathway forward
What are Source Waters?

“Source water is a raw, untreated supply of water – typically surface water or groundwater – used for current or potential future drinking water.”

– AWWA Source Water Committee
What is Source Water Protection?

“Source water protection is a proactive approach to safeguard, maintain, or improve the quality and/or quantity of drinking water sources and their contributing areas.”

– AWWA Source Water Committee
Why Source Water Protection?

• Long-standing issue across sector, recent renewed focus
  - Cyanobacterial bloom in **Toledo, OH** in 2015 → “Do Not Drink” order for 400,000 people for three days (a combination of many sources of nutrient loads)
  - **Salem, OR** cyanobacterial blooms lead to on and off “Do Not Drink” orders for 170,000 people over about a month in 2018

• Opportunity to reduce risk, instill public confidence, and reduce treatment costs
What is Agricultural Conservation?

1. Voluntary, incentive-based work on private lands for environmental and public health benefit (e.g., reduce nutrient and sediment runoffs)

2. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers substantial cost-share to producers (farmers, ranchers, forest landowners)

3. Includes activities such as buffer strips, fencing, cover crops, nutrient management, bioreactors, and others
How Does it Work for Utilities?

- Identify source water protection challenges with agricultural connection
- Work with NRCS on ways to focus conservation programs to address issues
- Apply for relevant program(s)
- Work with Soil & Water Conservation Districts and other established partners

Not necessarily linear!
AWWA’s Involvement in the Farm Bill

Advocated for:
1. Making source water protection a goal of the conservation programs
2. Inviting utilities to participate on state and local committees that inform the programs
3. Increasing cost share of measures that help to protect source waters
4. Spending at least 10% of conservation funding on source water protection

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AWWA’s Initiative

- Building awareness about conservation programs across water sector
- Advocating for utilities to partner on National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ASEP), and other programs for mutual benefit
- Ongoing initiative to incorporate source water protection through program updates across conservation programs
- Included farm bill advocacy on source water protection
Educating the Sector

You can watch the *Farm Bill Key in Protecting Drinking Water* video on [AWWA’s YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/).
Educating the Sector

These and other source water protection resources are available on the AWWA Source Water Protection page.
National Water Quality Initiative

- About $30 million available per year
- Focuses additional EQIP funds to protect source waters (traditional program is for CWA issues)
- No FY19 NWQI Source Water Pilot projects in SW section states, opportunity for the future!
What is RCPP?

• The Regional Conservation Partnership Program:
  - Conservation “at scale”
  - Brings additional resources to area to address identified issues
  - Looks favorably on broad partnerships
  - Looks favorably on 1:1 match from partners (cash & in-kind)
  - Can take many different forms
  - NRCS dollars go to producers, partner dollars can go anywhere relevant
## Overview of Examples with Utility Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Value</th>
<th>Primary Source Water Protection Target(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas (White River)</td>
<td>$8 million</td>
<td>Sediment and phosphorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia (Savannah River Basin)</td>
<td>$3.3 million</td>
<td>Land conservation to protect quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois (Otter Lake)</td>
<td>$1.7 million</td>
<td>Nutrients and sediment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa (Middle Cedar)</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
<td>Nitrate reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas (Milford Lake)</td>
<td>$8 million</td>
<td>Cyanobacterial bloom risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina (Mills River)</td>
<td>$1.5 million</td>
<td>Streambank restoration and safer agrichemical mixing</td>
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</tbody>
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Recent Examples

Cedar Rapids, IA is partnering in an RCPP with over $4M available for nitrate reduction over 2015-2020 to:

- Develop watershed plans to target BMPs for best source water protection benefit
- Provide assistance to implement BMPs
- Conduct outreach to spread the word including additional implementation
Beaver Water District, AR is working with 13 partners on an RCPP with over $8M available for various conservation practices (2016-2021)

- Utility contributing $1M in Source Water Protection funds
- Combining partner resources to seek 1-2 miles stream restoration, 2-4 miles riparian zone restoration, 150 farm conservation plans and at least 300 conservation practices
Current Project - Building Case Studies

Three new RCPP projects recently begun:

- Illinois ($1.7 Million Including Match)
  • Reduce nutrients and sediment inputs into Otter Lake

- North Carolina ($1.5 Million Including Match)
  • Streambank restoration and safer agrichemical mixing into Mills River

- Kansas ($5 Million Including Match)
  • Reducing risk of cyanobacterial blooms (nutrient reduction) in Milford Lake
Recent & Ongoing NRCS and EPA Activities

1. NRCS National Bulletin of May 6, 2019 – identify local priority areas for source water protection in every state

2. NRCS National Bulletin of June 25, 2019 – clarify changes to NWQI and solicit application for the next round of projects

3. EPA issued a memorandum on July 26, 2019, in response to an amendment to Section 1452(k) of SDWA, as included in AWIA of 2018, to expand source water protection-related eligibilities under DWSRF program. The availability of these funds can be used to leverage other funding sources such as conservation funds from NRCS as authorized under AIA of 2018.

4. Landscape Scale Restoration program of U.S. Forest Service – FY2020
Recent & Ongoing Opportunities

1. RCPP funding ($300 million) announcement has been made on September 3, 2019 with a three months application period (due December 3, 2019); NRCS plans to hold a webinar on September 26 at 3 PM ET

2. NWQI source water areas are being worked on – for use the select proposals

3. Other opportunities year-round through state conservationists

REACH OUT!
Key Take-Aways

1. Get to know the NRCS state, area, and district conservationists.
2. Sign up for state technical committees and local workgroups and contribute their knowledge of source water issues and concerns.
3. Partner with Soil & Water Conservation Districts and others with established track records in their watersheds.
4. When/where ready and appropriate, be part of RCPP, NWQI, CIG, ASCEP, or others ($300m available for RCPP through Dec 3, 2019).
5. AWWA’s Source Water Protection Page has materials to assist
## NRCS Contacts

### Oklahoma

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<th>Contacts</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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Questions for You!

• What source water challenges do you have with an agricultural connection?

• What are you doing about it now?

• What can you start doing with agricultural conservation?
QUESTIONS?
PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU HAVE A PROJECT IDEA!

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