

PROTECTING DRINKING WATER SOURCES IN INDIANA

Local groups working with USDA's Farm Service Agency spread wellhead protection across the state

The Problem:

The Alliance of Indiana Rural Water (AIRW) has been working with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Drinking Water Branch and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to coordinate wellhead protection (WHP) efforts throughout the state.

The Approach:

This coordination is being facilitated by Toby Days of AIRW, who works with Jim Sullivan of IDEM to first identify and select water systems to work with. Then, Toby engages the associated county FSA office to reach out to farm producers within the WHP zone to provide information about the importance of protecting drinking water sources and make them aware of USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) funding eligibility for these areas.

Key Collaborators

- Alliance of Indiana Rural Water
- EPA Region 5
- IDEM Drinking Water Branch
- Indiana water utilities
- USDA Farm Service Agency

This collaborative effort in Indiana was made possible because of all of the hard work by multiple entities that was previously undertaken by EPA Region 5 to engage USDA and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to change state CRP eligibility from a fixed radius to GIS-modeled wellhead capture and protection zones; and by the state and 92 county FSA offices to sign individual confidentiality agreements with IDEM to share the WHP GIS data and maps.

The Outcome:

All the work that went into these efforts is now providing the foundation for Toby Days of AIRW to work with the county FSA offices to send out brochures (about WHP and CRP funding opportunities) to all of the farm producers who own or lease land within the WHP area, based on the combined GIS map overlay. Note: Because of FSA confidentiality requirements to protect farmers' names and addresses, the FSA (instead of AIRW or IDEM) must contact the farmers directly.

Toby also works with some of the county FSA offices to conduct workshops that bring the farm producers and a variety of stakeholders together to discuss local WHP planning and CRP funding opportunities. The FSA will typically host the meeting at their offices and arrange for speakers to talk about their applicable programs. Audiences at these workshops are also comprised of water and wastewater operators; USDA, Soil and Water Conservation District, FSA, and state clean water and IDEM Drinking Water Branch staff; mayors; council members; county planners; health department and rural development representatives; watershed groups; and teachers. For example, Toby worked with multiple water systems in Randolph County on a comprehensive effort to conduct a workshop and develop a resource document with maps and contaminant source locations, and contact information for each water system. This brings together partners who work collectively to implement a WHP plan for the entire County.

As of June 2012, four contracts for CRP in WHP areas have been signed up in Indiana and over 70 acres have been taken out of crop production. As enrollment continues to occur, they anticipate that it will be difficult to track where and how much land is enrolled in this program. The Alliance and DWB are working with FSA to be able to track that data through the State FSA office.

For More Information:

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