

Act Before There's Not a Drop to Drink

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By Lynn L. Bergeson

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Protecting ground water is essential

Ground water is a key drinking water source in many parts of the country. Ground water provides a base flow to most surface water, making it an integral part of the water cycle. "Out of sight, out of mind" has particular relevance to ground water regulation. Unlike regulatory measures applicable to more visible surface water bodies such as lakes, streams and other waterways, federal and state ground water regulatory measures and policies historically have been less comprehensive and not as integrated as they should be with watershed, ecosystem and land-use management laws. Our lack of appreciation of ground water resources has resulted in many problems, according to the GWPC. For example, ground water pumping in the Arizona desert has caused the land to subside in some basins.

GWPC

The GWPC began in 1983 as a nonprofit national association headquartered in Oklahoma to represent five states that wished to create a forum to address technical and regulatory issues associated with underground injection control (UIC) and general ground water protection issues. Since then, it has refocused to a broader range of interests keying off its core aim of protecting ground water and ensuring it's viewed as an essential ecosystem component.

Currently, the GWPC's board consists of senior state agency managers from each state in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 10 regional offices. Its core members include regulatory agencies' representatives responsible for ground water protection and UIC activity.

The GWPC also welcomes interested stakeholders, including industry and public interest representatives, concerned with the protection of ground water resources.

Specific areas of interest

The GWPC's recent report *Ground Water Report to the Nation: A Call to Action* (www.gwpc.org/calltoaction) looks at topics that include ground water use and availability; ground water resource characterization and monitoring; ground water and source water protection; ground water and land use planning and development; ground water and stormwater management; ground water and underground storage tanks; ground water and onsite wastewater treatment systems; ground water and UIC; and ground water and abandoned mines. Each topic includes key messages, factual information, and specific "recommended actions" directed at EPA, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and state geological surveys, state governors and legislatures, state agencies, and local governments.

For example, the *Ground Water Resource Characterization and Monitoring* section urges development of a coordinated national data collection and monitoring program that gives decision makers the ability to identify information, including: baseline ambient ground water quality; where and how ground water quality is being degraded; location of ground water recharge areas; patterns of ground water withdrawal and recharge within identified watersheds (to allocate resources sustainably and maintain healthy ecosystems); ground water contribution to stream baseflows and areas of ground water/surface water interaction; and the relationship and significance of ground water quantity and quality to the maintenance of healthy rivers, lakes, streams, wildlife habitats and fisheries within given hydrogeologic settings.

Recommended actions include urging Congress' support and necessary funding to federal and state geologic surveys and water resource agencies to further hydrogeologic mapping and ground water monitoring networks (e.g., ambient, impacted-area, targeted) needed to understand, manage and protect the nation's ground water resources. According to the GWPC, EPA should ensure that ground water is identified as an integral part of EPA's strategic plan, national monitoring strategy, and other federal agency resource management plans.

Keep informed

Protecting ground water resources will increasingly be an area of focus. The GWPC website offers useful information on both key issues and suggested actions to address issues of concern.

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