



TDWC Currents

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TDWC Making History With Latest Works

A research project of historic proportions and the first-ever countywide monitoring of public drinking water sources are on the plate of the Triple Divide Watershed Coalition. Members moved forward on each of these lofty projects during their quarterly meeting in November. Mark Stephens, a geologist from the Pa. Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), attended to advise TDWC members on logistics. A state grant has been approved to cover the bulk of expenses for a detailed groundwater study across Potter County. When it's concluded, a database will be available that details where much of the county's groundwater comes from, as well as its characteristics and move-



JOB WELL DONE! All affiliates of the TDWC are grateful to John McLaughlin, who is stepping down as coalition chairman after leading the organization since its inception. A retired Pa. Dept. of Environmental Protection employee, John's expertise and methodical leadership skills have been instrumental in the TDWC's success. They've created a firm foundation for the future.

ment patterns. The information will be invaluable for public policy-makers, industries, regulatory agencies and many others. Through the testing of upwards of 50 water wells in strategic locations, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) will be able to amass and share detailed data.

"This will be an extremely valuable tool for protecting our water when we're choosing sites for certain types of development," said John McLaughlin, TDWC chairman.

"There is much we simply do not know about our ground water supplies, movements, and other characteristics."

Well data will be assembled and analyzed in a cumulative fashion, with the identity of individual well owners protected. Confidential findings from the analysis will be provided to each owner. Groundwater can contain a variety of suspended and dissolved substances such as bacteria, minerals

and gases. These substances are often naturally occurring, but can be influenced by activities occurring on the land surface. A comprehensive list of water quality parameters will be analyzed for each well.

Meanwhile, the coalition has been designated to administer a \$100,000 payment from JKLM Energy to cover installation of 24/7 monitors on the 11 public water systems in Potter County. Like the groundwater study, this is a historic "first" for Potter County. Each of the system operators is a member of TDWC. Monitors will log water quality data and serve as an early-warning system in the event of contamination. JKLM paid the \$100,000 as part of a settlement with DEP for illegally using a drilling surfactant that migrated into the groundwater via subsurface fractures at a shale gas well pad off North Hollow Road in September 2015.

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What is TDWC? A history lesson



“Potter County’s Triple Divide Watershed

Coalition is not only the first of its kind in

Pennsylvania, but also a leader in the nation.”

Nearly six years have passed since the Triple Divide Watershed Coalition was formed to create a united front to protect and effectively manage the public water resources of Potter County. Along the way, the organization has garnered national and statewide recognition.

TDWC became official in early 2011 when representatives from every public water system operating in Potter County came together to sign a memorandum of understanding, committing themselves to “protecting public water sources across Potter County from potential degradation.” Original coalition members included municipal systems in Shinglehouse, Austin, Galeton, Coudersport, Genesee, Port Allegany, Roulette and Ulysses, as well as the Northern Tier Children’s Home and Charles Cole Memorial Hospital. Most of them have stayed actively involved.

Groundwork had been laid by the Potter County Commissioners, Potter County Planning Commission and Potter County Conservation District, with support from the Pa.



EPA’s K. R. Young (center) commended the Triple Divide Watershed Coalition during a meeting in Roulette. He’s flanked by Kurt Logue of Austin and Julie Kollar from the Water Resources Education Network.

Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Penn State Extension. But most of the credit goes to the public water system operators, who had earlier committed themselves to developing accredited Sourcewater Protection Plans, through funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and assistance from DEP.



Mark Stephens, a geologist from DEP’s Williamsport office, told TDWC members at their first formal meeting, “You folks in Potter County caught on before the others, so you are the leaders. We all understand that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Potter County’s Triple Divide Watershed Coalition is not only the first of its kind in Pennsylvania, but also a leader in the nation.”

His comments were echoed a few months later by K. R. Young, a sourcewater protection specialist with EPA: “The things you are doing need to be replicated elsewhere. One of the things we’ve learned at EPA is that sourcewater protection has to be locally driven – we can’t do that from the top down. What you are demonstrating in Potter County is the tremendous opportunity that exists to unify agencies and organizations to protect our water. I can’t congratulate you enough.”

Members committed to a risk reduction strategy that included public education, communication with property owners and industry representatives, sharing of resources and

training opportunities, and other elements. Another benefit is the opportunity for bulk purchasing of supplies, equipment, laboratory services, and other ongoing needs at local water systems.

By forming the coalition, public water system managers in Potter County have also been able to share best practices and speak with a unified voice on proposed legislation and regulations/enforcement issues. Coalition members have continued to press for a close watch by regulators on industrial activities that are proposed in close proximity to public water sources and recharge areas. The group draws its names from the county’s unique geographic distinction as the headwaters for three major northeastern U.S. watersheds. Water from Potter County flows north to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, south to the Ohio and Mississippi, and east to the Atlantic Ocean. Each of these starts on a plateau just north of the village of Gold. An unofficial motto of local water stewards is, “It was clean when it left here.”

A separate organization, the Potter County Water Quality Work Group (see page 4), was assembled by the Potter County Commissioners as a complement to TDWC. The group’s mission extends protection and educational efforts beyond public water supplies to creeks, streams, rivers, springs and wells. It includes representatives from the Potter County Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, Penn State Extension, local watershed associations and other organizations.

Taking our mission to DEP/Harrisburg

Protection of public water supplies was the mission of a regional delegation that traveled to Harrisburg in December to make their case before the Pa. Dept. of Environmental Protection. DEP Deputy Secretary John Stefanko hosted the meeting with a delegation that included Potter County Commissioner Paul Heimel, representing the Triple Divide Watershed Coalition; Carl Cox, chairman of the Tioga County Sourcewater Protection Coalition; Dr. Jennifer Whisner, professor at Bloomsburg University; Brian Heiser, representing the State College Water Authority; and Eric Moore, chairman of the Northcentral Pa. Sourcewater Protection Alliance.



Among attendees at a water protection meeting in the Rachel Carson State Office Building were (from left): Dr. Jennifer Whisner, Bloomsburg University; John Stefanko, DEP Deputy Secretary; Brian Heiser, State College Water Authority; Paul Heimel, Potter County Commissioner; and DEP representatives Marcus Kohl and Mark Stephens, from the Williamsport Regional Office.

Stefanko pledged to share the messages with DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell and other decision-makers in the agency. The group called on DEP to support studies to identify the sources,



contents/quality, and movement of groundwater. With gas and oil industry leaders forecasting a frenzy of shale gas-drilling in future years, these studies would establish baseline data and pinpoint areas of special concern. U.S. Geological Survey is providing funding and technical assistance for the studies, one of which is scheduled to get underway in Potter County next year. Dozens of water wells across the county will be evaluated to create the database.

On a related note, the local representatives urged DEP to take into account the proximity of public

drinking water sources when reviewing permit applications for drilling and other land disturbances. Many public water suppliers, including all in Potter County, have approved sourcewater protection plans that would provide the relevant information to DEP permitting personnel. Other issues aired included the importance of public education provided by the Water Resources Education Network (WREN), and the bureaucratic challenges that local governments are facing due to conflicting regulations of DEP and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission.

PRWA important ally

Among the organizations that have supported and partnered with TDWC is the Pennsylvania Rural Water Association. Based in Centre County, the non-profit organization provides technical support, certified training and other services for system operators charged with providing safe drinking water and wastewater management.

PRWA is a member-supported, non-government organization that is on the forefront of water and wastewater system technology. Leaders have developed contacts with state and national government agencies, enabling even the smallest system to benefit from a united effort based on strength in



numbers.

PRWA has worked with local water systems in Potter County and welcomes inquiries. For more information, see the website prwa.com or call 1-800-653-7792.

Work Group Complements TDWC Activities



from Rochester, N.Y., all the way into Maryland. A portion of the corridor passes through Potter County, starting at the state border near Genesee. Additional details will be made available in the near future. A proposal to hold a major “Water Summit” educational event in Potter County in 2017 was also aired. Jared Dickerson, watershed technician at the Potter County Conservation District, and Bob Volkmar from Upper Allegheny Watershed Assn., are spearheading the plan.

December’s attendees included Frank Weeks, Will Hunt, Earl Brown, Jason Childs, Bob Volkmar, Charlie Tuttle, Jared Dickerson, Darrell Davis, John McLaughlin and Commissioners Doug Morley, Susan Kefover and Paul Heimel. Next Water Quality Work Group meeting will be held at 8 am on Feb. 13 at the Gunzburger Building. Those seeking more information about the organization should contact Jason Childs at the Potter County Conservation District; j.childs@pottercd.com or 814-274-8411.

A number of people from public agencies and volunteer organizations are engaged in water protection. Among them, from left, are Jared Dickerson, Jason Childs and Alex Veto (bottom) from the Potter County Conservation District; Penn State Extension’s Jim Clark; and Bob Volkmar from Trout Unlimited and the Upper Allegheny Watershed Association.

Triple Divide Watershed Coalition’s scope is primarily the water sources that supply public distribution systems in Potter County. But what about all of the other water resources? That’s where the Potter County Water Quality Work Group comes in. It was assembled in 2010 by the Potter County Commissioners in response to growing concern expressed by many members of the public about the potential environmental impact of a forecasted shale gas drilling boom. But once all of the parties had begun to gather around the table, it became evident that the organization needed to expand its mission.

What members discovered was that many volunteer organizations and public agencies were performing important work to protect the county’s rivers and streams from degradation, but communication among them was sometimes lacking. That’s no longer the case. Membership is comprised of the following organizations: Potter County Conservation District, God’s Country Chapter of

Trout Unlimited, Penn State Extension, four of the county’s volunteer watershed associations (Upper Allegheny, Genesee Headwaters, First Fork of Sinnemahoning, and Pine Creek), Potter County Commissioners, Potter County Water Dogs (volunteer water quality monitors), and the Potter County Planning Department.

During the group’s December meeting, Chairman Jason Childs, manager of the Potter County Conservation District, summarized a half-dozen ongoing projects geared toward protecting water quality and enhancing public education. Among them are improvements being made to Ludington Run, a Genesee River tributary, to improve fish habitat; hands-on projects with livestock operators to prevent stream impairment; and providing assistance to farms where Chesapeake Bay protection regulations are being implemented.

Members discussed proposals for a 400-mile recreation trail following many of the waterways extending



TDWC Currents is the official newsletter of the Triple Divide Watershed Coalition.



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