

Protecting a Sensitive Aquifer

State and Local Cooperation

Jerry Mason

2013

Valuing the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer

- Modest depth to water
- Highly permeable cover – glacial
- Supplies needed water for over 500,000 people
- Federal involvement with designation and protection
- Affected by regulations in two states
- Crosses multiple jurisdictional boundaries

Tracking with Efforts by State of Washington

- Washington provided local funding for aquifer protection efforts
- Panhandle Health District interacted regularly with Washington regulators
- Idaho health districts have no independent revenue authority
- Numerous local government officials recognized vital nature of aquifer

Public Support for Aquifer Protection

- Public understanding of aquifer vulnerability was widespread
- Local governments with taxing authority were capped
- Jurisdictional boundaries hindered consistent cooperation among local agencies
- Steering committee formed to work with legislators

Options Explored

- Meetings of stakeholders and legislators brought concerns to the fore
- Problems with any type of disagreement brought possible support for new funding
- Legislators tested options with colleagues to determine where opposition might lie
- Legislators advised governance by existing governing board - County commissioners

Shaping Legislation

- Aquifer Protection District idea was developed
- Option to apply in other locations was evaluated
- Need to precisely define the aquifer boundaries
- Need to maintain a revenue structure that was simple and minimal, if possible
- Learn from Washington experience

The Legislative Proposal

- Modeled after aspects of the ambulance district statute
- Initiated by petition and decision by the Board of County Commissioners to call election.
- Funded by user fees
- Legislation includes cap to limit funding
- District has no regulatory powers

A Functioning Protection District

- Authorized by Idaho Code title 39, chapter 5
- Only applicable to the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer – legislators determined resistance in other parts of the state
- Projected household fee for 2014 will be six dollars (\$6) per household
- Funds health district efforts to manage critical materials and storm water- studies by IDEQ

Lessons Learned

- Understand the science and explain it
- Be patient – communication takes time if you don't have unlimited resources
- Advocate a “small bite” solution – don't overreach
- Persist – you won't prevail the first time around