

Source water protection is paramount for any system

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment's Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) was finalized this summer. The question water system operators and the public may be asking is, "what is SWAP and what do we do with it?" SWAP assessed and evaluated 762 public water systems across the state. The source water assessment report generated by SWAP for each of the 762 public water systems provides information on the susceptibility of a water system to contamination and lists many of the potential sources of contamination. The assessment and evaluation of a water system's vulnerability to contamination was the first step of the SWAP. The second step is utilizing that information to develop a source water protection plan and implementation of water quality protection measures.

In September, representatives from the State Farm Service Agency, State Natural Resource Conservation Service, Kansas Department of Health and Environment and Kansas Rural Water Association met to identify source water protection priority areas in Kansas. These priority areas are public water systems that have experienced nitrate and total coliform MCL violations during the last two and a half years. The systems identified were prioritized based upon population served, concentration, an expressed interest in source water protection, and geographic information.

The USDA Source Water Protection Program administered in Kansas by KRWA provides

technical assistance in the development of source water protection plans. Source water protection planning consolidates watershed and public water system information enabling effective implementation of contamination remediation and prevention measures. Source water protection planning can reduce or eliminate potential risks to drinking water supplies.



USDA sign in front of a conservation buffer in Marshall County Conservation District proclaims, "Providing Profit - Protecting the Environment."

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During source water protection plan development a local development committee will be formed to aid in the review of potential contaminant sources and develop water protection measures. The goal of the water protection measures for a public water system is to promote conservation and water quality while avoiding unnecessary adverse effects on activities within the watershed. This is accomplished by local involvement in the development of protection measures, which may include public education, voluntary water quality practices, or local regulatory and statutory controls.

Jim Jackson, KRWA Tech, assumed the position of Source Water Specialist in early November. Matt Steele, who had been employed by KRWA, resigned to accept employment with the environmental division of the Kansas Livestock Association.

Public involvement throughout the process is a priority of the program. If you are interested in participating, call for Jim at 785/336-3760 or email KRWA at krwa@nvcs.com. Jim is eager to provide public education, training and coordinating collaborations between communities and local, state and federal agencies.

Conservation BUFFERS

USDA FACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Farmers and ranchers are among the strongest and most credible advocates for use of buffers and supporting practices. Some national facts about buffers include:

- More than 250,000 buffer contracts with USDA have been signed.
- Nearly 160,000 farms and ranches have buffers, installed under voluntary programs that provide annual rental payments and other financial incentives.
- There is no bidding, no waiting. Offers are automatically accepted if eligibility and other requirements are met.
- Payments vary across the country, with an average of about \$97 an acre per year.

Many farmers and ranchers find that setting aside environmentally sensitive land makes a lot of economic sense.

In addition to providing economic benefits, buffers can help achieve a number of important conservation objectives. When used with supporting practices, buffers can help to:

- Prevent soil erosion.
- Improve water quality by removing sediment, fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants from runoff.
- Improve air quality.
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Control flooding.
- Improve farm safety.
- Protect buildings, roads, and livestock.
- Conserve energy
- Beautify the landscape.

USDA's voluntary incentive programs, including the continuous Conservation Reserve Program — CCRP — are stronger than ever. They are valuable tools that can help sustain an operation and protect the environment — good news for today and tomorrow!

America's farmers and ranchers often must 'go it alone,' but when it comes to buffers, other partners have jumped in to help, expressing a message of, "we're in this together!"

- Groups like Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited and Quail Unlimited believe so strongly in buffers that they are committing thousands of dollars and volunteer assistance to increase buffer establishment.
- Citizen groups are providing funding and volunteer support for buffer programs.
- States and cities are supporting buffer programs on rural land, in recognition of the positive impacts buffers have on drinking water supplies.
- Rural lenders often promote buffers as a wise economic Choice.

- Many farm-related groups and businesses, including cooperatives, also support buffer use.



A planted field on the right is separated from a stream to the left by a 50-yard buffer strip of native grasses along Wildcat Creek in Nemaha County. This buffer strip is on the downstream side of a highway.



An agricultural area pictured above in Nemaha County includes a buffer strip and tree line that helps prevent erosion of the field to the right. These elements in conjunction with rock fill in the wash in the foreground prevent the loss of topsoil and farm chemicals going downstream.

Conservation BUFFERS

Buffers are the right choice

Conservation buffers are a simple way for farmers and ranchers to stay profitable while protecting their land. USDA supports the use of buffers on cropland, pasture and rangeland through several conservation programs, including the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program, or

fences, farmable wetlands/wetland buffers, marginal pastureland wildlife habitat and wetland buffers.

- Up to 50 percent cost sharing for practice installation.
- A practice incentive payment of up to 40 percent of eligible practice installation costs.

nationwide for installing riparian buffers on marginal grazing land.

More options for producers

Today, more than ever, USDA's conservation programs are complementary, so that farmers and ranchers can combine conservation practices to do what's best for their working land. The programs are also voluntary, and most provide incentives and cost sharing.

One of America's largest private land conservation programs is the CCRP. Incentives and cost sharing make it a wise economic choice, and it's recognized by farmers and ranchers across the country as common-sense conservation at its best.

A related program available in about half the states is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. CREP is a federal-state-local program that addresses specific conservation needs, primarily water quality, in the states where it operates.

In addition to CCRP and CREP, several other programs can help

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CCRP. Unlike the regular CRP, sign-up for the CCRP is available year-round.

Financial incentives available through CCRP are especially attractive. They include:

- A signing incentive payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, shelterbelts, field windbreaks, living snow

- A 20 percent rental rate incentive for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways and field windbreaks.
- A 10 percent rental rate incentive for wellhead protection areas.
- Higher annual maintenance payments per acre for certain activities.
- Competitive rental rates

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Conservation BUFFERS

install conservation buffers. Following are a few examples:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program — Significant increases in funding for EQIP in the 2002 farm bill make it an attractive program. Livestock related natural resource concerns and other conservation priorities, including

Wetlands Reserve Program — Landowners can protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property with this voluntary program.

Forest Land Enhancement Program — A new program in the 2002 farm bill FLEP provides cost sharing, technical assistance and education to owners of private forest

In addition to CCRP and CREP, several other programs can help install conservation buffers.

buffers, are among the practices EQIP funds. Local input helps establish local conservation priorities under EQIP.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program — WHIP is a voluntary program for landowners who want to develop and improve fish and wildlife habitat on private land.

land. Planning tree planting, fish and wildlife habitat, riparian restoration and forest improvement are among the practices that states and private landowners may focus on with FLEP.



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