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InFlow-Line

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Complete registration and program information for the **THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL JOINT CONFERENCE**, May 24 to May 26 at the Hyatt Regency in Newport.

PROTECTING WATERSHED LANDS



Al Dion of Groton Utilities says that it just makes sense to bring all the interested parties to the table.

Protecting watershed lands for future generations is the goal of an ambitious project undertaken by Groton Utilities, the state Department of

Public Health and several towns, agencies and local partners.

“Safeguarding human health, ensuring environmental and economic health and preserving the watersheds’ natural capacity to ensure water qualities, today and for the region’s future generations is the goal of this project,” explained Al Dion, Groton Utilities. The project will also serve as a pilot project supporting the State’s source water protection initiatives and providing a source water protection model for Connecticut’s 125 other communities with water supply watersheds.

“It is our intention to accomplish improved source water protection through sound partnership with the Connecticut Department of Public Health and development of effective community planning agency partnerships,” Dion pointed out.

“Our water sources currently provide excellent water quality but development pressures and the resulting increase in storm water runoff and effluent discharges to groundwater aquifers within watershed lands will eventually result in water quality degradation unless all communities come together to provide for smart growth through a cooperative planning effort.

How will they accomplish this ambitious goal?

for the Future

by Elizabeth Gara
Executive Director, CWWA

Critical Control Point management planning (CCP) will be used for planning watershed protection and development in this area. CCP is long-term implementation planning that identifies specific actions and controls for critical areas within a watershed. It emphasizes long-term water quality protection and minimizing risks to public health.

Critical Control Point management planning was first used in addressing food processing safety and has been modified for natural resource work, according to Gerald Iwan, Ph.D., Director, Drinking Water Section, State Department of Public Health. Water utilities in France, Australia, the United States and Iceland spoke at an international conference last year on how CCP had been implemented and the benefits it provides. All agreed that CCP helped them respond more quickly to water quality issues, helped them identify new risks and allowed them to be proactive in preventing problems from occurring.

Groton Utilities, a municipal water utility serving Groton, Noank, Groton Long Point and Ledyard, will serve as project manager, offering technical and

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- Lori Mathieu, Supervising Environmental Analyst for the state Department of Public Health

administrative support in addition to coordinating the project partners and stakeholders. Because Groton Utilities will soon become a regional supplier with the completion of a water main interconnection across the Thames River to serve Montville, they have a critical



opportunity to accomplish important regional goals.

The project hopes to address the following regional goals: 1) assurance of safe drinking water; 2) open space preservation; 3) Low Impact Development in environmentally sensitive watershed areas; 4) Smart Growth development applications; 5) improved quality from non-point source discharges to Long Island Sound; 6) maintaining reasonable costs for water treatment; and 7) regulatory compliance. The state Connecticut Department of Public Health, the state Department of Environmental Protection, the Office of Policy and Management and the Planning & Development departments from the Towns of Groton, Ledyard and Preston have all been identified as project partners.

What is the first step? The first step is sometimes one of the hardest - bringing people together. Fortunately, Groton’s 100-year celebration prompted a lot of discussion within the community about how to protect the area’s watersheds. This served as an important springboard to start looking at CCP and how it could benefit the community.

“Support and input from citizens, governing boards, public works, public utilities, the regional planning agency and various community groups and private businesses will be absolutely critical to the project’s success,” Al Dion of Groton Utilities explained.

One of the first steps in the project is to identify critical areas where protection and management is needed to preserve watersheds in the region. With proposals for parks, ball fields, golf courses, and new residential and commercial developments, it makes sense to move forward with a proactive plan rather than a reactive plan, according to Lori Mathieu, Supervising Environmental Analyst for the state Department of Public Health.

One of the benefits of using CCP planning in watershed protection is that the plan “will reflect the character of the community,” Iwan pointed out. Iwan added that CCP is a non-regulatory approach that will be less costly, less bureaucratic and less likely to result in litigation. It is consistent with EPA’s move toward more flexible approaches to watershed protection.

“The planning process itself is transparent. Everything is on the table so there are no surprises. This is beneficial

to everyone, including developers and town planners,” Mathieu added.

In addition, says Dion, public education is a key component of the plan. Information meetings, public hearings, visits to schools and watershed tours to inform people of the need to move forward with a balanced approach for protecting water resources while addressing the need for economic development and continued residential growth, will be a major focus for utilities and planning departments.

What are the barriers to moving forward? At this point, the project needs funding to move forward. The state Department of Public Health is trying to assist the project by finding federal funding sources. There is also legislation pending before the Connecticut General Assembly that would appropriate \$200,000 to the project.

Connecticut has long recognized the link between the quality of its water

sources and how the surrounding land is used and maintained. The state Department of Public Health has instituted a Source Water Protection program that establishes water quality standards that set overall goals for the protection, restoration, and management of surface and groundwater quality in the state. It also requires local planning and zoning commissions to consider the protection of existing and future sources of public drinking water in their local land-use plans and regulations.

“The Connecticut Water Works Association certainly supports this type of voluntary approach, which may work very well in some communities.

However, there are other important legislative and regulatory measures that could provide for consistent statewide source protection and water supply planning which we must continue to actively support,” commented Carlene Kulisch, CWWA President. 💧



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