



# Groundwater Protection and Water Wells Workgroup Meeting

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*Wednesday March 13, 2013*

*Hosted by the DEC*

*1<sup>st</sup> floor conference room 555 Cordova St. Anchorage with teleconference*

Attendees in Anchorage :

Kathy Kastens (DEC-statewide), Chris Miller (DEC-statewide), Charley Palmer (DEC-statewide), Roy Robertson (DEC-Mat-Su), Rebecca Baril (DEC-statewide), Fred Sorensen (UAF-statewide), Jeff Ellison (Water Well Contractor - WWC), Curt Hefty (WWC), Kris Westberg (WWC), Wayne Westberg (WWC) , Milo Pitner (WWC), Kim Pitner (WWC), Jim Munter (Hydrogeologist/Consultant), Ted Schacle (WWC), Elizabeth Rensch (Certified Laboratory), Melissa Hill (DNR-statewide), Roy Ireland (DNR-statewide), Larry Swihart (WWC).

Attendees via teleconference line:

Chuck Ice (WWC-Fairbanks), Lee Ice (WWC-Fairbanks), Barbara Roberts (PWS Owner - Kenai), Dan Brotherton (WWC), John Craven (PWS Owner-Fairbanks).

## Meeting Minutes

Facilitator: Kathy Kastens (DEC)

Introduction

- Meeting agenda summarized by Kathy: Who is going to be part of this workgroup? What is the objective of this workgroup? What our expectations of the meetings and the members? What kind of structure will these meetings follow?
- Introductions/roll call of everyone in the room and on the teleconference line was taken.
- Kathy stated the current goal of the workgroup (and all meetings hereafter) as: *“The goal of the Stakeholders’ Workgroup will be to resolve, address, or provide recommendations on each of the issues that were compiled, validated and agreed upon from the original stakeholders’ meetings held in October of 2012.”*
  - Members were then asked if they had any comments, questions, or revisions of the goal.
    - Comments made whether the stakeholders agree with every single issue on the list documented, whether the concerns may be from people who are uneducated on the topics, and whether other issues may be added as brought forward.
    - The DEC responded that we are not intending to provide a “silver bullet” to cover all the issues. The issues were compiled from all attendees at the meeting so they might have a voice of issues from their perspective; it was agreed during

the meetings that they were valid issues for someone, as well as sent out for comments. Any issues not already compiled will be recorded on a separate list and addressed only after the currently identified issues have been addressed if the workgroup is in agreement to continue.

- The question was then posed as to who would comprise the membership of the workgroup, and what level of commitment will be asked of/required?
  - A side comment/question was asked as to what is the agenda or what will be the final outcome of the workgroup, and whether there would be anything more than documented discussion.
  - The DEC reiterated that there is no “agenda” for how we plan to resolve the identified issues. It was reiterated that the solutions will be those agreed upon by the workgroup members. Resolutions identified as desirable to pursue will be passed on to whatever the proper entity for action is, or action may be taken by the workgroup members if they have the authority to do so.
- Kathy proposed ideas to consider as far as workgroup member expectations: Who gets to volunteer? What are the parameters for a member? What are the ground rules for the meeting? What are the criteria of a stakeholder? When do we want the next meeting to be and how often should meetings occur?
  - It was noted that the DEC would be willing to compile and disseminate all minutes and information from the workgroup meetings.
  - Discussion as to the style of the meetings began.
    - The concept of one meeting in each area (Kenai, Wasilla, Fairbanks) and to collaborate the information from each was proposed.
      - It was mentioned that that could possibly cause confusion and unnecessary cost.
    - It was agreed that the meetings would be statewide with teleconferencing and web-meetings.
  - A comment was made that a list of “involved stakeholders” should be made
    - A comment was made in this discussion that this list of stakeholders may not necessarily be involved or present at the workgroup meetings, but are nonetheless identified as a stakeholder. “All workgroup members are stakeholders, but not all stakeholders will necessarily be workgroup members” (but all are welcome).
      - DEC agreed and stated that the workgroup should attempt to make decisions keeping non-participating stakeholders perceived interests in mind.
    - Stakeholders involved as identified in the meeting:
      - DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation)
      - DNR (Department of Natural Resources)
      - DOL&WD (Department of Labor & Workforce Development)
      - DOT&PF (Department of Transportation & Public Facilities)

- PWS (Public Water System) owners and operators
- Financial institutions / Realtors
- Consultants
  - Hydrogeologists
  - Engineers
  - Others
- General public
  - Private well owners
  - Public water system consumers
- Educational institutions
- Water well contractors
  - Well drillers
  - Pump installers
- State-certified laboratories
- Municipal and local government agencies (i.e., boroughs, muni, etc.)
- Concerns were then identified in relation to gravel industry, oil industry/fracking, and mining industry whom are known to be drilling wells for industrial purposes and the effect they may have on groundwater protection.
  - Kathy commented that there are a lot of issues on the table as it is, and the workgroup shouldn't allow itself to take on too many more issues in order to ensure focus is kept on the current identified issues that need to be addressed. These additional concerns can be documented and the workgroup can decide to address them in future discussions beyond the immediate goals of this workgroup.
- Concerns were brought to the table from DNR and there was a discussion on the need for the workgroup meetings. It was noted, however, that the majority of the stakeholders at the October meeting, and in the subsequent survey that sent out as well as attendees at this meeting, thought that the workgroup meetings were the agreed upon way to move forward.
- Expectations:
  - Expectations of workgroup members:
    - Show up and participate (either in person or by phone/web conference)
      - DEC offered to provide the means for workgroup members to participate remotely.
    - Be respectful
    - Disseminate information / interact with non-participating stakeholders in order to bring collective opinions that represent each stakeholder entity.
      - A side comment/note was made that all the minutes from the meetings will be made available to the public.

- The DEC will do as much as they can to ensure that workgroup members without internet access will receive the minutes and other applicable information.
  - Play nice with others – Be cooperative at meetings.
    - A comment/question was raised pertaining to allowing intermittent stakeholders who can provide specific knowledge and information concerning unique situations (permafrost in the interior was used as an example).
    - The DEC responded: These meetings will always have open doors to allow for collaboration and a broader understanding of issues, but with the understanding that we prefer smaller, consistent workgroups for efficiency and progress.
  - The concept of workgroup members being strictly on a “voluntary” basis was brought forward in order for everyone to be participating on their own time. It was discussed that this should apply to DEC representatives as well.
    - The DEC responded that this can be discussed, but may be an issue for reasons other than preference.
- Meeting expectations
  - Frequency of meetings? The floor was opened for comments or suggestions.
    - The drillers indicated the drilling season has essentially started as of now and that there was widespread concern among the drillers of these meetings being scheduled in a way that would cause interested parties to choose between business and their interest in these workgroups.
    - Kathy listed the many options that were available as well as any other concepts that anyone may have.
    - A comment was made that it should be understood that the meetings won’t necessarily be the time when action is completed, but rather most work will be accomplished in the span of time between meetings.
      - It was added by another that too much time between meetings could provide for a loss of momentum, and that members can lose track of their priorities and responsibilities.
    - A comment was made that perhaps the first meeting should be scheduled as soon as possible (to be accomplished before the well drillers “busy season” began) and that frequency may “hash itself out” within that meeting. The “busy season” usually coincides when road weight-restrictions are removed, typically in April.
    - Many well drillers voiced the concern to keep in mind that many crews (and businesses alone) are two-person crews that cannot be split for safety reasons and that if one of those crew members leaves, the other cannot work either, and it would cut into businesses financially.

- After discussion of dates and how much time was needed to accomplish certain tasks a meeting date was confirmed for Wednesday March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
      - For future reference, it was agreed that weekdays from 6-8pm seemed to be in the general workgroup members' favor.
  - Well drillers proposed a general idea of possibly a “summer sabbatical” or just a decrease in frequency (possibly limited) for the summer/busy season.
  - A discussion began that in order to determine a frequency, the workgroup may first need to have an idea of what the projected time frame would be as far as results are concerned.
    - Well Drillers seemed to convey that monthly is too often, but that quarterly isn't often enough if a time frame of 1-2 years is what is in mind. Nothing was finalized.
  - A discussion that the issues list needed to be prioritized; it was suggested that this would be a good topic to cover in the first workgroup meeting.
  - Workgroup format:
    - The DEC will provide a conference room in Anchorage and will have the next meeting as well as any following available in a web conference format. Video capability and availability would be explored for the next meeting.
- A poll was taken to get an idea of who in attendance at the meeting was willing to commit to becoming a regular workgroup member. The list was collected by the DEC.
    - General results
      - 1 public water system owners
        - John Craven
      - 1 educational institution representative
        - Fred Sorensen (UAF Cooperative Extension)
      - 1 consultant
        - Jim Munter
      - 1 certified laboratory
        - Elizabeth Rensch
      - 8 water well contractors
        - 6 drillers
          - Wayne Westberg
          - Lee Ice
          - Dan Brotherton
          - Larry Swihart
          - Ted Schacle
          - Jeff Ellison

- 2 pump installers
      - Craig Seime
      - Dave
    - 5 DEC Drinking Water Program representatives
      - Chris Miller
      - Charley Palmer
      - Roy Robertson
      - Rebecca Baril (meeting minutes)
      - Kathy Kastens (facilitator)
    - Others may be included that were not at the meeting.
      - Al Nagel DOL/WD
- The floor was opened for additional comments/questions/concerns:
  - The question was raised as to whether anyone logs complaints taken from well owners.
    - UAF Cooperative Extension Service (Fred) explained that he does not receive complaints necessarily but that people come to him for unbiased educational information.
    - The DEC explained that they document complaints regarding PWSs, but as far as private well owners there is not much information or help that they can offer.
  - Chris Miller from the DEC commented that a survey is being compiled to be distributed to the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA) asking what other states have developed to address similar issues that were identified by Alaska stakeholders.
    - It was mentioned that NGWA provides information similar to this and may be another option to gather information.
  - Lee Ice (president of AWWA) voiced his opinion that whatever the resolution may be to these issues, that it not require extra fees, permitting or inspections for well drillers. He explained that he does not want the resolutions to slow business progress for the well drillers.
  - John Craven commented that there is a lot of pressure and backlash directed at PWS owners. He suggested that maybe more testing along private wells may provide a better understanding of private wells. He voiced his concern connected to separation distances of septic systems with public wells and concerns of consistency of follow up by the DEC.
    - The well drillers asked John if he has genuine concerns about public health that he sees. They also asked if he was implying that enforcement is an issue.
    - John voiced the concern that there is not enough pressure on prevention and that there is no action until there is a problem, then the PWS owner tends to get stuck with solving the problem as it affects their water quality.
  - Kathy commented that the workgroup must cooperate and work together between stakeholder groups. It seemed to be agreed that all members want to work to protect groundwater. In order for this to work, collaborative help from everyone is necessary. It is important to not be defensive, and to understand that the list we have compiled of

issues was derived and agreed upon from the October discussions. Kathy also mentioned that those that choose not to be cooperative and/or generally distract from the topics needing to be addressed at the meetings may be asked by workgroup to no longer participate or to find another representative that could voice their concerns in a more productive manner.

Reminder: The next meeting will be held **MARCH 27, 2013 FROM 6-8 PM**

There will be an option to attend by phone, web conference or in-person in Anchorage and Wasilla. The DEC will look into whether other DEC offices (such as Kenai and Fairbanks) will be available to host the web conference in their own conference rooms, but there is a concern of whether staff will be available to monitor. Roy Robertson offered to be available to set up a conference room in the Wasilla office that will have the web conference set up. We will keep all the workgroup members posted as to the availability there and in the other offices.

**Happy National Groundwater Awareness Week!!!**