

DNR AND FSA PROGRAM EXPANSION WILL BETTER PROTECT PUBLIC DRINKING WATER WELLS

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DES MOINES – More public wells in Iowa are eligible for a federal program that helps protect public drinking water sources.

The DNR and USDA Farm Service Agency have expanded eligibility for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) designed to protect land around public drinking water wells.

The expansion provides a greater potential of increasing protection of Iowa communities' drinking water sources by enrolling land within a 2,000 foot radius of a public wellhead into CRP.

“This is a great partnership effort that has the potential to decrease contaminant risk to Iowa’s public water supplies,” said DNR Director Richard Leopold.

The DNR’s Source Water Protection program has changed its process for designating wellhead protection, or source water protection, areas. These areas may be eligible for CRP if they have completed a DNR source water protection Phase 1 report for communities with active public wells. The DNR provides the list of eligible community water supplies to FSA. FSA then determines if the land within the protection areas are eligible for CRP based on cropping history.

“The new designation provides positive options for Iowa landowners as well as community water supplies,” said Derryl McLaren, State Executive Director of the Iowa FSA.

Over the history of the wellhead protection program, less than 3 percent of eligible land has been enrolled. In an effort to better protect Iowa’s community water supplies, the new designation increases the number of eligible public water supplies from approximately 240 to nearly 900.

“It would benefit many of Iowa’s public water supplies to enroll land in the CRP wellhead protection program,” said Lyle Asell, DNR Assistant to the Director for Agriculture and the Environment. “By working with private landowners to make improvements, communities can possibly save their residents the substantial cost of purchasing their drinking water from another source or having to dig another well.”

Landowners who own cropland within a 2,000 foot radius of a public well in an eligible community can enroll that land into the CRP program with a 10- to 15-year contract. This

helps protect the drinking water of their community by replacing cropland with grasses or trees.

In return, landowners receive added incentive payments above the regular CRP contract. Interested landowners can contact their county FSA office, their regional DNR private lands biologist or DNR source water protection program coordinator (contact information below) to find out more about the program.

To determine if your community is eligible, contact your local FSA office or contact Becky Ohrtman, the DNR source water protection program coordinator, at (515) 281-0932 or email: Rebecca.Ohrtman@dnr.iowa.gov

A list of USDA-FSA county offices and phone numbers is available at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=ia&agency=fsa>

More information is available on the DNR Web site at www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/sourcewater.html

A list of private lands biologists is available on the DNR Web site at www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/privatelands/ or by calling (515) 281-5918

A list of priority and highly susceptible community wells can be found on the DNR Web site at www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/files/swp_map.pdf