

Comprehensive Planning

The State of Wisconsin requires Wisconsin cities, villages, towns and counties that adopt or amend zoning, land division or official mapping ordinances to do so consistent with a comprehensive plan beginning January 1, 2010. As of January 2012, the Wisconsin Department of Administration estimated that 60 county comprehensive plans, 1402 municipal plans, 4 tribal plans and 5 regional plan commission plans were submitted. A map of counties and municipalities with a final, adopted plan is available at <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=5961>. Of those communities that have not adopted a plan, many do not exercise land use regulations that require consistency with a plan (Herreid, 2011).

Communities that rely on groundwater as their sole source of water need to assess the magnitude and limits of their water source as part of their comprehensive plan, but most have little expertise in quantifying and protecting their water supply. A project funded by the UWS partnered with such a community (Richfield, WI) to determine what kinds of groundwater supply information are most relevant and usable for planning from a community's perspective (Cherkauer, 2005). This study determined that a good basic understanding of the geology, sources, sinks and water balance of its aquifer system are needed so that residents and community leaders know where their water comes from. Interaction with users at all levels is also crucial to developing the awareness needed to create long-term plans and supporting laws to ensure a sustainable water supply under foreseeable future conditions. The next step is to share this model with other communities to help them plan how best to actively manage and protect the recharge areas that supply their water.

A related UWS-funded project evaluated whether Wisconsin communities are addressing groundwater in their comprehensive plans, and what tools would make them more likely to do so (Markham, 2005(A)). This project provided multiple presentations to local and state groups involved in groundwater planning; a webpage of study results; articles in a Center for Land Use Education newsletter distributed to more than 160 community planners and educators; a presentation to about 100 people at the 2005 conference of the American Water Resources Association-Wisconsin Section; and publication of an article in a national journal (Markham, 2005(B)).

A DNR- and USGS-funded project provided support for centralizing access to groundwater information for use in comprehensive planning (Markham, 2008). The project utilized an interagency team of federal, state and local agencies to assist numerous Wisconsin communities with comprehensive planning by providing groundwater information and data in an accessible and user-friendly manner. Specifically, the interagency team provided personalized assistance for three pilot counties in the form of a 20-30 page report and a locally-tailored presentation for citizen plan commission members. The same interagency team prepared a centralized website that provides a suggested process for integrating groundwater information into comprehensive plans. The website also includes web pages for each of Wisconsin's 72 counties that include local data about groundwater susceptibility, sources of drinking water, groundwater quality, potential sources of contaminants, groundwater quantity, and money spent on cleanup and ground-water protection strategies. The website is available at <http://wi.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/index.html>. From July 2012 through May 2013 the website had an average of 1,678 unique visitors per month who accessed an average of 3,605 pages per month during this timeframe. February 2013 was excluded from this analysis due a suspected error in the statistics. The comprehensive planning law states that comprehensive plans must be updated at least every 10 years. As communities update their plans, the most recent data on the website is from 2002-2006 for water quality and 2005 for water quantity.

Long term hosting and maintenance of the site is undetermined.

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References

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