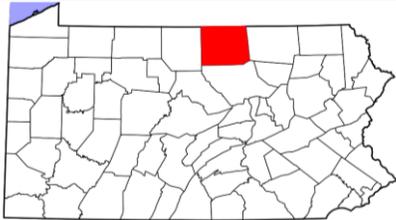


Profile of 2011-2012 WREN Grantee:

The Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition sees “Power in Numbers”

By Ellen Kiley and Julie Kollar



Tioga County, PA

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”
Henry Ford

Why not do it yourself? You're a local water supplier: you have your own treatment facilities, your own Source Water Protection (SWP) plan, your own board, your own community to worry about – why not go it alone? For many years, that has been the approach of individual drinking water suppliers around Pennsylvania.

The latest trend though, is that water suppliers are seeing definite advantages to forming partnerships with fellow water systems, local officials and even conservation groups. “There is more power in numbers,” says Mr. Carl Cox, President of Knoxville Borough Council, “when dealing with the DEP, with the legislature, with anybody. A county-wide organization has much more clout than an individual water supplier.”

Mr. Cox is the Acting Chairman of a new group known as the **Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition**. The coalition was launched in 2011 with the support of a [Source Water Protection Grant](#) awarded to the [Tioga County Conservation District](#) by the [Water Resources Education Network](#) (WREN). Erica Tomlinson, now District Manager at the District, submitted the grant proposal to WREN along with initial grant partners: the Tioga County Conservation District, the Tioga County Planning Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Pennsylvania Rural Water Association and six public water systems: Borough of Wellsboro, Duncan Township Municipal Water Authority, Knoxville Borough Water Department, Osceola Township Water Authority, Tioga Borough Municipal Authority and Westfield Borough.

Water supplier membership has now more than doubled to include fourteen public water systems, including Bakercrest Personal Care Home, Bloss Township Municipal Authority, Blossburg Municipal Authority, Elkland Borough Authority, Hamilton Township Municipal Authority, Mansfield Borough Municipal Authority, Nelson Township Municipal Authority, and Watrous Water Association, Inc. GTS Technologies has also been attending coalition meetings. The eventual goal is to encourage all twenty-four community drinking water suppliers in Tioga County to participate as active members.

“The Coalition is easy to join, and membership is free,” states Erica Tomlinson, District Manager of the Tioga County Conservation District and WREN Grant Project Leader. The Coalition holds quarterly meetings, hosted by a different water supplier each time, allowing the members to tour each facility and exchange ideas. Drinking water suppliers are not required to have a Source Water Protection Plan (SWP) in place to join; but as members, they will be encouraged to begin the voluntary process and will receive guidance and assistance from current members.

What is Source Water Protection?

Source Water Protection is a science-based way to protect the life expectancy of public water supplies by preventing pollution from reaching raw drinking water sources used by the community, including groundwater aquifers, springs, streams, reservoirs, or river intakes. Establishing a Source Water Protection Program is voluntary in Pennsylvania, and allows for local control over local water quality issues. Supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, it offers communities an extra margin of safety beyond water treatment

Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition Members

Tioga County Conservation District

Tioga County Planning Commission

Westfield Borough

Tioga Borough Municipal Authority

Borough of Wellsboro

Duncan Township Municipal Water Authority

Osceola Township Water Authority

Knoxville Borough Water Department

Bakercrest Personal Care Home

Bloss Township Municipal Authority

Blossburg Municipal Authority

Elkland Borough Authority

Hamilton Township Municipal Authority

Mansfield Borough Municipal Authority

Nelson Township Municipal Authority

Watrous Water Association, Inc

PA Department of Environmental Protection

Pennsylvania Rural Water Association

GTS Technologies

technology, making it useful to keep harmful contaminants out of the water supply, including emerging contaminants, allowing safer water to reach the treatment plant and ultimately, the consumer.

Asked why more water suppliers do not already have a Source Water Protection plan in place, Mr. Cox said, "Because Source Water Protection plans aren't mandated. A plan can be developed, right now, for free, except for the appropriate signage." Mr. Cox believes that time is of the essence, and encourages drinking water suppliers to get to work on their protection plans now, given the pace of change in Pennsylvania.

The process is budget-friendly, as PA DEP provides funding and technical support to assist systems in developing a source water protection plan at no out-of-pocket cost that will:

- map out key drinking water recharge zones for intakes or wells based on local hydrogeology
- inventory potential sources of contamination
- prioritize the risk of potential contaminant sources
- assist with contingency plans and future water supply planning
- provide a custom set of source water management strategies to reduce risks.

The initial driving goal for Tioga Coalition founders was to improve emergency response coordination to potentially hazardous spills in sensitive water supply areas with the Tioga County Department of Emergency Services. To accomplish this objective, the members deemed it essential to integrate the source water protection areas defined in each water supplier's plan with Tioga County's 911 system. Blue and white road signs calling out "Water Supply Area" advise travelers that might observe a spill to call 911. Tioga County's automated system will soon immediately notify all affected drinking water suppliers so they can take immediate action to protect the community.

The Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition reached out last fall to inform the [Tioga County](#) Board of Commissioners about their goal to ensure that there is enough clean water in the county today and for future generations. While gas well drilling has sparked concerns in the county, the Coalition recognized the need to address the full range of potential threats that also include agricultural impacts, roadway spills, failing septic systems, and polluted runoff.

The Board of Commissioners demonstrated their support by authorizing the time and involvement of Tioga County Planning Commission Director, Jim Weaver. Jim has been actively involved in source water education for years.

Among his many community outreach efforts, Jim has trained citizens in a group called the Pine Creek Headwaters Protection Waterdogs to recognize and report public safety concerns or environmental problems associated with gas well drilling.

The Tioga County Source Water Protection group has reached out even further to other Source Water Protection coalitions in nearby Lycoming (see [WREN April 2012 E-News](#) article on **North Central Source Water Protection Alliance**) and Potter counties (see WREN [April 2012 Feature](#) on **Triple Divide Watershed Coalition**), exchanging ideas and setting the stage for future cooperative efforts. “Water supplies, recharge areas, pollution – these things don't understand political boundaries,” said Mark Stephens, P. G., SWP Program Manager at the DEP North Central Region. He feels that increased cooperation among source water protection groups will bolster educational and legislative efforts in the state.

The Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition has developed a logo, and used a portion of grant funds to produce an educational brochure that informs local residents about potential threats to their drinking water, and outlines easy steps that community members can take to help protect their water. Coalition members distributed brochures at the 4-H Environmental Appreciation Days, and gave entertaining presentations using an EnviroScape® Watershed model (<http://www.enviroscapecom.com/>) to 600 6th-grade students and 50 accompanying teachers. Coalition representatives also hosted a table at the Mill Cove Environmental Area's Earth Day Celebration, along with a diverse group of hunters, environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts. “Our members have really enjoyed doing public education events and would like to do more of them,” says Ms. Tomlinson.



Pennsylvania Grand Canyon near Wellsboro

Home to one of the state’s most spectacular natural attractions, the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, Tioga County is rural with a population of just over 42,000 people. Tioga’s name is derived from an Indian word that means “the forks of a stream” to honor the Tioga River. About one half of County residents are served by public water. Current coalition members serve a combined total of about 78% of the population served by public water, about 15,000 people.

In addition to emergency response, public education was deemed to be the most effective source water protection management strategy by the coalition. People learn best when they can easily see impacts. To help local officials and the public visualize key land areas needing protection and grasp the effects of stormwater runoff, the coalition turned to visual tools as recommended by WREN, including source water protection maps showing the recharge areas, and other models, including the EnviroScape® Watershed model, groundwater model, and a new stream table model acquired under the grant.



"EnviroScape® Coastal Model in action by Monmouth County Friends of Clearwater, Eatontown, NJ"

According to PA DEP, sediment from unpaved roads is a significant contributor to stream pollution. Tioga County has the greatest number of miles of unpaved roads in the state of Pennsylvania. Recognizing that a clear understanding of proper maintenance and placement of these roads would be important and would greatly benefit the county's surface water supplies, the Coalition purchased a stream table model to complement the EnviroScape® Watershed model already in use. According to Ms. Tomlinson, "The impacts of agriculture and dirt roads cover most all of the county due to our rural nature, and greatly affect our source water protection areas. We thought being able to demonstrate to municipal officials and landowners how erosion and farming activities affect our water suppliers would be really helpful. A lot of our water suppliers are fed by surface waters and those impacts really add up."

Coalition member Susan Keck, also Secretary/Treasurer of the Borough of Wellsboro, has these words of encouragement for anyone interested in protecting their community's drinking water: "Don't delay – start today! The sooner you get started," she continued, referring to SWP planning and coalition formation, "the sooner you'll be protected."

Ms. Tomlinson offered advice on partnerships: "The more partnerships you have, the easier it is to start programs, and the less scary it is. Getting everyone together has provided momentum to move forward, rather than leave the (SWP) plans sitting on the shelf."

In addition to the new coalition in Tioga County, fruitful source water protection partnerships are proving to be an excellent way to protect affordable clean water for future generations. As the Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition is finding, working together to put source water protection plans into action will offer long term benefits to the health, safety and welfare of Pennsylvania residents. They hope their example will inspire others to work together to make a difference and ensure there is enough clean water for Pennsylvania families.

Below is a partial listing of drinking water coalitions in the Commonwealth. Many have received WREN grants to support their community education efforts. To get started in your community, subscribe to the WREN newsletter to stay tuned for news and resources. Check the [WREN website](#) this fall for updates about the next round of 2013 WREN source water protection education grants.

Pennsylvania Source Water Protection Coalitions (a partial listing):

- Central PA Source Water Alliance for Protection (2012-2013 WREN Grantee)
- Lycoming County North Central Source Water Protection Alliance
- Triple Divide Watershed Coalition (2011-2012 WREN Grantee)
- [Potomac River Basin Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership](#)
- Tioga County Source Water Protection Coalition (2011-2012 WREN Grantee)
- Upper Schuylkill County Source Water Protection Committee
- Southwest PA: RAIN, the [River Alert Information Network](#) - 63 public water systems participating along with systems in West Virginia (2011-2012 WREN Grantee)
- [Schuylkill Action Network](#) in southeast PA

For More Information

For information on PA DEP's Source Water Protection Technical Assistance Program (SWPTAP), please visit www.sourcewaterpa.org. A [Fact Sheet](#) on the SWPTAP program is available. In addition to WREN, Pennsylvania Rural Water Association (www.prwa.com) is also a valued Source Water Protection Partner, and offers source water protection assistance to medium and small public water systems.

About WREN

The Water Resources Education Network (WREN) is a project of the **Citizen Education Fund of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania**. WREN works to help communities across Pennsylvania protect and improve our most precious natural resource, our water. WREN is a nonpartisan informal collaboration of organizations and public officials working for the protection and management of Pennsylvania's Water resources, both surface and ground water, through community education and informed policy-making. WREN provides training and grants for local coalition building to promote community awareness and development of public policies necessary to protection Pennsylvania water resources. Since 1992, the WREN Project has provided almost \$2 million in mini-grant funding to over 300 Pennsylvania community partnerships working to safeguard clean water today and for future generations.