

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
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**PLAN FOR MANAGING GROUNDWATER IN SUSQUEHANNA
WATERSHED RELEASED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Commission seeks to balance groundwater use for economic development and
environmental protection**

CORTLAND, N.Y. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) today released for a 90-day public comment period a draft plan regarding groundwater management throughout the Susquehanna basin. The 160-page draft plan, *Groundwater Management Plan for the Susquehanna River Basin*, includes: (1) an assessment of the current groundwater problems and management issues, and (2) a series of 37 recommended actions needed to ensure the sustainability of the basin's groundwater resources and to address impacts on the resource, including those from growth and development, droughts, current and past mining, transfers out of watersheds, unknown and unregulated uses, and management measures.

The Susquehanna basin is a 27,510-square-mile area covering portions of upstate New York, about half of Pennsylvania and the area of Maryland where the Susquehanna River drains into the upper Chesapeake Bay. The basin holds about 69 billion gallons of groundwater and nearly half of the basin's 4.2 million residents rely on groundwater for its drinking water supply.

SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz said, "The demand for groundwater continues to increase, impacting the quantity and quality of that resource. Our goal is to protect that resource, while meeting the growing demands for domestic supplies and economic development."

In the Susquehanna basin, the major categories of groundwater use include public water supply, mining, domestic, industrial, livestock, commercial and irrigation. Concentrated growth and rapid development in many areas has increased the demand for groundwater and impacted the quantity and quality of the resource. Impacts include well interference (impact on the performance of wells due to overlapping drawdowns), groundwater mining, loss of recharge areas, loss of stream base flow and perennial flow, reduced sustainability of groundwater sources, and cumulative adverse impacts.

In addition to impacts in the high-growth areas, SRBC assessed many other groundwater impact issues and problems, from mining and other activities. The broad categories of groundwater issues and concerns addressed in the draft groundwater management plan are:

- Areas of intensive growth and development
- Water-intensive land use in smaller watersheds
- Watershed transfers
- Impact of acid mine drainage on limiting the availability of clean groundwater
- Unknown and unregulated groundwater use
- Loss of pristine watersheds
- Drought impacts on base flow
- Mining impacts

To address these and other groundwater problems, SRBC identified and detailed the benefits of numerous management options, established a rating system for prioritizing the options and identified responsible lead and support agencies to implement the options. The management options identified in the draft plan include:

- Developing local water budgets
- Establishing special protected areas
- Identifying and protecting critical aquifer recharge areas
- Conducting cumulative impact analysis
- Enforcing compliance measures
- Strengthening SRBC's review of groundwater withdrawal and use applications
- Establishing water-use data management systems
- Creating and distributing regional hydrogeological information
- Promoting interagency cooperation

Swartz said, "Through proper management of our vital groundwater resource, we can balance groundwater use for both environmental protection and a healthy economy. The two are not mutually exclusive, but we need to make sure that water resource managers have good planning tools available to them. This groundwater management plan provides the guidance for developing such tools."

The draft plan also emphasizes the need for increased public outreach and education. In particular, SRBC wants to raise awareness of the important relationship between groundwater resources and the 32,000 plus miles of streams in the Susquehanna basin.

Swartz said, "People often view the two resources, surface water and groundwater, as separate, not realizing how the two interrelate. Groundwater contributes to surface flows and, sometimes, vice-versa. This relationship also applies to water quality concerns."

"In the case of groundwater, we have to be particularly vigilant in our education and outreach efforts because what we don't see, we tend to forget about or view as a limitless resource. The many homeowners who lost their well water supply during the severe droughts in 2001 and 2002 certainly know that it's not a limitless resource."

As part of the outreach effort, SRBC has scheduled three public workshops to brief people on the draft plan and to receive their comments. The three workshops will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on:

- July 15, Wildwood Conference Center, Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- July 21, The Atherton Hotel, State College, Pennsylvania
- July 22, Owego Treadway Inn, Owego, New York

Persons interested in attending a workshop should contact Patricia Adams at SRBC, (717) 238-0423, ext. 302 or by e-mail at padams@srbc.net.

The draft plan is available on SRBC's web site at www.srbc.net, and on CD-Rom or hard copy format upon request. Persons interested in commenting on the draft plan should direct their comments by September 9, 2004 to Paula Ballaron, Section Chief, Project Review and Compliance, Susquehanna River Basin Commission, 1721 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA, 17102, Phone: (717) 238-0423, ext 222, Fax: (717) 238-2436, E-Mail pballaron@srbc.net.

The draft plan, which is a comprehensive update to SRBC's 1993 groundwater management plan, was developed by SRBC with guidance from its Water Resources Management Advisory Committee. The committee is comprised of representatives from SRBC's four members – the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland – and SRBC staff.

SRBC is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on December 24, 1970 by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

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