

Green Communities Association Rural Water Protection Program - Summary

Background

In November 2000 Green Communities interested in rural initiatives met to discuss priorities for joint rural initiatives. Improvement of rural water quality (ground and surface) was identified as the major issue for action. It was agreed that to improve rural water quality a successful program would include wellhead protection, septic tank management, and shoreline protection and rehabilitation.

Barriers to landowner water protection exist in every community. They include a lack of general understanding about best management practices and/or financial constraints to implement them. Opportunities to address these barriers include:

- working with accountable government agencies responsible for rural water quality who are under increasing pressure to ensure drinking water quality
- enhancing dissemination of correct information on water resource protection by working with multi-sectorial partners (see list of partners attached.)
- improving access to financial resources to make recommended improvements

Water use and human waste disposal in many communities is dictated by customs that are many years and even centuries old. Large-scale changes will take years to implement and will rely heavily on one-on-one discussion of alternatives. For this reason it is important that this program pay particular attention to recruitment of community members who are sensitive to local customs and social behaviours regarding water use and waste disposal.

A comprehensive rural water quality protection program is proposed for rural Ontario residents. A solid community-based social marketing strategy will be developed to ensure continuing neighbour-to-neighbour transfer of knowledge for years to come. For more about community-based social marketing theory visit: www.cbsm.com.

Green Communities

Ontario Green Communities have conducted more than 100,000 home visits consisting of energy and water-saving device installations and general information to assist individuals in making informed, cost-effective environmental choices for themselves and their families. Most Green Communities engage in greenspace naturalization. They sell rain barrels, composters and native plants to homeowners, distribute factsheets on yard naturalization, and hold workshops on a variety of natural greenspace issues. A few members have considerable experience in rural water protection activities and it is our intent to expand and share this expertise with communities across the province.

Founded in 1995, the Green Communities Association links Green Communities to share information and expertise, build capacity, and work together on joint projects. Information-sharing is facilitated by the weekly **GCA News**, **Green Communities Resource Manual**,

GCA Website, issue specific on-line forums, workshops, and group training. The GCA now includes more than 35 members from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, British Columbia. Major supporters of the GCA include Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

For more information about the Green Communities Association and its members visit: www.gca.ca.

Goal

To improve rural water quality in Ontario and protect this valuable resource from contamination at source by helping to achieve:

- wellhead protection (includes abandoned wells)
- effective waste treatment management (septic systems best management, alternatives)
- riparian (shorelines, wetlands, streambanks) zone improvement and protection
- water conservation

Objectives

- build awareness among the rural population of the need for water protection through individual landowner action and stewardship
- provide expertise for troubleshooting common contamination sources and solutions
- build effective delivery models for rural water quality enhancement programs

Methods

A comprehensive program is proposed with four major components:

- **Rural water protection information kits** for general distribution.
- **Water protection clinics** to provide information and discuss local strategies for action.
- **Water protection visits** to discuss individual household water issues and potential solutions on a one-on-one basis
- **Incentive programs** for rural household water quality improvements

Each component is outlined in more detail below. A comprehensive outreach strategy to include community-based social marketing principals will be developed along with each program component.

Target Group

Ontario households without municipal sewage treatment and/or treated water. These include cottages, cabins, farm houses, and rural non-farm residences.

Key Issues

Each component of the project will provide information and stimulate positive action on the following:

- identifying poor water quality
- detecting existing and potential problems
- protecting wellheads (include abandoned wells)
- implementing septic system best management practices
- improving and protecting riparian (shorelines, wetlands, streambanks) zones
- conserving water
- evaluating and promoting effective alternative human waste management systems (e.g. composting toilets, grey water treatments)
- testing water quality
- reducing use of toxic substances and proper disposal of household hazardous waste
- engaging in neighbourhood and community action (how to talk to neighbours, making local links and participating in community action)
- addressing specific local issues, cultural practices and behaviours
- evaluating household water treatment systems

PART I: Information Kits

A rural water quality information kit will include information on each of the key issues listed above. Distribution will be through a variety of outreach activities.

Each factsheet or information tool should include appropriate graphics and be at a moderate reading level.

Wherever possible existing, high quality materials will be used to avoid duplication and minimize development and printing costs. Example: *Best Management Practices: Water Wells*, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

PART II: Water Protection Visits

Water Protection Visits for rural residences to discuss individual household water quality issues and potential solutions on a one-on-one basis. Advisors will:

- be recruited from target communities and have existing social links to the target audience
- be trained in rural water best management practices
- advise households on rural water best management practices through various outreach activities

- make visits to individual dwellings and advise the homeowner on general practices and site-specific concerns
- have access to ongoing technical support from water resource protection experts
- make follow-up calls to accurately report on measurable improvements made by program participants

PART III: Water Protection Clinics

Green Communities will host locally organized water protection clinics to provide information and identify local strategies for action. (See key issues for content).

PART IV: Incentive Programs

Develop and/or market existing financial incentive programs for water quality improvements. These may include:

- composting toilet installations
- septic system replacements
- wellhead improvements
- plugging up abandoned wells
- fencing livestock from shorelines
- installation of water conservation hardware

Quality Control

Throughout the development of a Green Communities Rural Water Protection Program the GCA will effectively supervise and ensure high quality of the outcomes of each component of the program. The GCA will:

- let contracts to the most qualified candidates
- organize effective training of Water Protection Advisors
- adopt or develop a certification process for Water Protection Advisors
- provide peer networking and technical support for Water Protection Advisors
- develop a training manual for visit program
- develop marketing strategy and materials
- investigate and build provincial partnerships
- develop a standardized reporting system for program measurables
- implement a system of quality assurance and quality control for Water Protection Advisors and Visits

Timeline: The project components will be fully developed by 1 May 2001.
The *Information Kit* will be ready for publication by 1 May 2001.
A six-month pilot visit program will be ready to be implemented 1 May 2001.
Further timelines for project implementation will be developed in conjunction with partners.