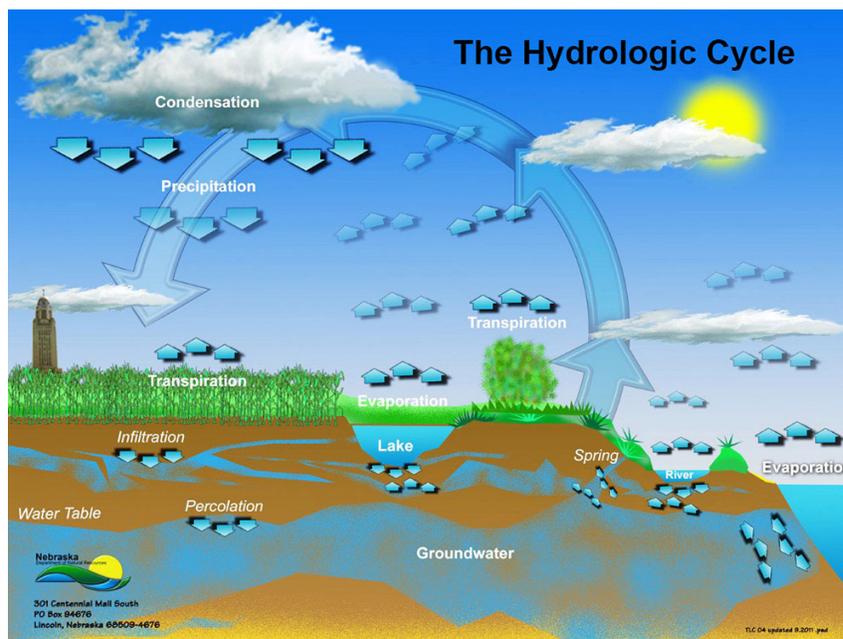


SPLASH INTO EXTENSION

Groundwater is vital to the “Good Life” in Nebraska. It maintains our agricultural economy, supplies water to streams and lakes, and provides drinking water to municipalities and rural households. Nebraskans pump groundwater out of the High Plains aquifer and many other aquifers across the state. The vast majority of groundwater is used for agricultural production.

Groundwater Protection: It's up to Everyone



If you think about the water cycle, you begin to realize the water we use every day, is in essence, recycled. There's no new water, we are drinking some of the same water the dinosaurs drank!

Keeping our drinking water sources safe begins with each of us. There are many things everyone can do to assist with groundwater protection whether you live in an urban or rural area.

Nebraska is often called “The Groundwater State” and for good reason — we sit atop the largest portion of the High Plains Aquifer, also known as the Ogallala Aquifer than any of the other states that it lies below. With this comes a critical responsibility that everyone can help with: groundwater protection.

Chemical and Medication Use/Storage/Disposal - The first thing everyone can do is always use and store household and outdoor chemicals according to the manufacturer's directions. Over application or improper use of these chemicals can be potentially harmful to you, our groundwater and the environment.

If you need to dispose of them, do so properly and safely. Lincoln/Lancaster County residents can drop off approved items for free at Lincoln's Hazardous Waste Center. For more information, go to <http://haztogo.com>. These chemicals include, but are not limited to: oil-based paints, solvents, cleaning products, petroleum products, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. For information about disposal sites outside the Lincoln area and links to helpful household hazardous waste information, please visit <https://www.knb.org/waste-programs/household-hazardous-waste>.

Proper disposal of unused/expired medications can also make a positive impact in groundwater protection. Many local pharmacies accept unused/expired medications. For further information, visit <http://nebraskameds.org>. Dumping chemicals or medications down the sink drain, storm drain or flushing down the toilet are not safe means of disposal.

Conservation - Everyone can help conserve our groundwater resources. Looking at how you and your family use water and implementing ways to conserve is not as hard as one might think. Easy steps in water conservation are:

- Check all faucets, taps and water using appliances both inside and outside your home.
- Fix any leaks or valves that won't shut off completely.
- Install water wise appliances such as low-flow shower heads, toilets, dishwashers, clothes washers and sprinkler heads.
- Mulch plants, water lawns/gardens in the early-mid morning hours, and only water when root zone moisture is needed.
- Choose landscape plants and lawn/turf options that are drought tolerant.

These tips not only help to conserve our groundwater resources, but can equate to a big impact in water usage. Thus, potentially helping to reduce your water bill if you are connected to a public water system or your power bill if you have a private well.

Private Well Ownership - Private well owners have additional responsibilities other than those previously discussed. Whether you own a domestic, irrigation or livestock well, you need to make sure all possible sources of contamination are kept away from your wellhead. The ground around your well head needs to slope away from it to aid in shedding water and potential contaminants away from your well.

Private wells, unlike public water system wells, are not required to be tested on a regular basis. It is highly recommended that private well owners, particularly owners of domestic wells, have their water tested on an annual basis for bacteria, nitrates and any other known contaminants of local concern. Your local Natural Resource District (NRD), whether it be the Lower Platte South NRD or Nemaha NRD (for Lancaster County residents), is a good place to inquire about the water quality in your area.

If you would like to order a nitrate, Coliform bacteria and/or other known contaminant test kit(s), you can call the Nebraska Public Health Environmental Laboratory at 402-471-3935. The Laboratory is located at 3701 South 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68502. There is a charge for each of these tests.

Abandoned Wells - If you own an abandoned well, you need to properly decommission it by hiring a Nebraska licensed Water Well Contractor. Abandoned wells are a potential liability and can be a direct conduit for contamination to the aquifer below. Many NRDs throughout Nebraska offer a cost-share program for decommissioning water wells. It is worthwhile to check with your NRD to find out more about their decommissioning cost-share program.

Protecting and conserving our groundwater resources is up to everyone. Small changes can add up to a big impact.

Source: water.unl.edu