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## **Protecting Wisconsin's groundwater an increasing focus for UWSP**

Remember earlier this fall when a significant stretch of the Little Plover River actually dried up? The health of the Little Plover River, and many other rivers and lakes throughout the state, depends on how much water is used by farmers, industry and homeowners.

The Center for Land Use Education (CLUE) at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point's College of Natural Resources is part of a growing effort within the college and statewide to provide opportunities for citizens and public officials to learn about the growing threats and issues surrounding groundwater quality and quantity. Over 95 percent of Wisconsin's communities get their drinking water from groundwater. From siting of municipal wells to agricultural impacts and everything in between, groundwater is becoming a key conservation concern as towns, cities and counties develop comprehensive plans. Questions addressed in the plans include: where does our groundwater come from, how much water will our community need in the future, will that water be available, and will it be safe to drink?

Lynn Markham, land use specialist at the center, is focusing much of her time these days on towns, cities and counties throughout Wisconsin that are planning for groundwater. Two years ago Markham, together with collaborators Bobbie Webster and Chin-Chun Tang from CLUE and Chuck Dunning from the U.S. Geological Survey, received a \$4,246 grant from the Wisconsin Groundwater Research Program to evaluate whether municipalities are focusing on groundwater when developing their comprehensive plans. The comprehensive planning law passed in 1999 requires that by January 1, 2010, all Wisconsin communities that make specified land use decisions related to zoning or land division ordinances base those decisions on a comprehensive plan.

According to Markham, the team of researchers analyzed 79 comprehensive plans that have been completed and adopted by their communities. They found that all but four communities had mentioned groundwater in their comprehensive plans. "Forward-thinking local government staff and consultants are critical to establishing good groundwater policies for any community. Communities that are more susceptible to groundwater contamination due to factors such as sandy soils and shallow groundwater included more groundwater-related goals than communities with less susceptible groundwater," said Markham.

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Thanks to a two-year grant (\$46,233) from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Markham plans to expand her project in collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey. “Many communities, especially smaller communities, do not have the resources or expertise to locate, evaluate, and incorporate appropriate groundwater information and data in their comprehensive plans,” said Markham. “At the end of this grant our goal is to have a user-friendly groundwater Web site where professionals and laypersons alike can easily access groundwater information to use in their area’s groundwater decision-making process.

“One need look no further than the city of Waupaca for a community taking a pro-active and positive approach to groundwater protection and conservation,” said Markham. “From water conservation programs that help industry and residential customers save money on their water bills to payments to farmers to grow low nitrogen input crops near the city wells, Waupaca is a wonderful example for other communities to follow.” The Waupaca case study and a summary of the project are available on the CLUE Web site at [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/groundwater](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/groundwater).

The project will be completed by summer 2007. The College of Natural Resources is also home to the Center for Watershed Science and Education and the Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center.