The Oasis

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Shifting sands blow across the vast abyss under the radiant heat of the sun. Parched lips tremble as daunting eyes search the landscape for a sign of moisture. Suddenly, a crow flies from an old dry snag on the crest of a large sand hill. Little time is wasted in exploring what is hidden beyond the horizon. Scrambling up the last few yards of the hill a sign of life appears, animal tracks wandering westward. The horizon gives way, and a glorious sight appears. Spirits sore, a sparkle in one's eye, and a reflection of the promise of life: **it is water!**

We live in a great country with wonderful water utilities supplying water to most. On a normal day we have little difficulty accessing safe drinking water. In many restaurants it's free. Most coin automated beverage machines now have bottled water available. Public buildings have provided water fountains with free access for years. We have faucets in our homes, some trimmed in gold, delivering fresh clean water to us. Recreational use of our plentiful water supply frequents back yards with swimming pools full of children. Huge urbanized areas are supplied with ample water to millions of people, their pets, and plants, even their green yards. Yet how often do we think of or understand the difficulties and expense that parallels a successful water supply system? Consider the cost of constructing hundreds of miles of pipeline, building water towers and pumping stations, and making payroll for those who are stewards of the supply and delivery. Fire protection capacities are often a considerable expense provided in many water systems as well. However, before all of this is possible, a source of water must be identified. The cost of producing a source can be expensive; therefore, the source must be adequately capable of providing a considerable amount, if not all of what is needed for the service community. Starting to sound complicated? There is much more to consider and it's important to know.

Not all water sources are drinkable in their present condition. Many water sources have to forgo treatment to meet safe drinking water standards. Sometimes the infrastructure for treating the source is extremely expensive in itself. The cost associated with all of this development must be financed and paid back, sometimes over several decades. Think about $30 to $60 a month or more for each water service, every month for the next 30 years, to operate, maintain and pay debt service and other necessary expenses for the public water supply. Once this is all completed and all we have to do is operate and maintain the water system, *are we done?* For those who have been involved from initially organizing the water utility to a point where the water system is well established, it may have seemed like a marathon. But are we done? Will it all take care of itself? Let's consider protecting our investment.

Platte County Water District No. 4 is a water system that has experienced considerable growth since the early days when it was initially constructed. One huge consideration for this water district early on was locating and developing a water source. In fact, Platte County PWSD No. 4 has several sources to help guarantee adequate amounts of water for the water supply system. Many of these are interconnections with other larger water supplies. But one of the major sources of water they depend on is a diamond in the rough. An "oasis" if you will, in the sand hills of Platte County. It is an underground aquifer stored away thousands of years ago that yields

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quality water. The water district has developed four wells over this aquifer which is utilized every day. Locating and developing this water source is one challenge met by the water district; another challenge is protecting the water source that's there. Source water protection is simply being stewards of our land and water. After all, it only makes sense to protect what took so long to develop and locate. Otherwise we could contaminate in minutes what it took Mother Nature hundreds of thousands of years to make nearly pure.

How is the Platte County Water District protecting their source of drinking water? They have collected about 50,000 lbs. of hazardous waste in and around Platte County. Considering that it only takes a few ounces of a particular chemical to contaminate a drinking water source, by collecting thousands of pounds of hazardous waste, these folks have helped protect billions of gallons of water from contamination. It takes opportunity and dedication from those who operate the water supply system and the community. In this case, a Solid Waste District was looking for sponsors to help fund a household hazardous waste clean-up event. That was exactly what Mr. Frank Offutt of Platte Co. Water District was looking for: an opportunity to clean up the neighborhood. Mr. Offutt and a handful of helpful citizens worked with local resources to help coordinate and fund a hazardous waste collection event. Through this initiative people are becoming aware of the environmentally sensitive area near Platte County public wells. The County Planning and Zoning staff also deserve merit in this effort. Planning and zoning establishes an effective tool for educating developers and contractors operating in this area. It can also provide common sense development planning that has a long term benefit to the community and water resources.

There are so many ways to protect our drinking water sources. It just takes the dedication of local folks like Mr. Offutt and company, and a fair amount of willingness to learn more about what goes on with our drinking water source and how to minimize contaminant risks. We then implement safeguards and educate residents, customers, and all those who can help in the process. If we can find water and develop the source, does it not make since to protect it for the future? Considering the investment that got us to this point, let us protect that investment and the health of the people we serve. Otherwise, the "Oasis" may disappear!