



STORIES OF PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING HEALTHY WATERS

EPA Region 3 Water Protection Division

Protecting Source Water in West Virginia

Charleston, West Virginia · January 19, 2017

EPA funds helped West Virginia residents and utilities engage in source water protection efforts in the wake of the Elk River chemical spill of 2014. The spill contaminated the water supply of nearly 300,000 people in the capitol city Charleston as well as multiple surrounding counties.

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) used \$15,000 from its EPA [Section 319 grant](#) to support a community education and engagement project to actively involve citizens in plans to protect their drinking water sources. The \$15,000 was the largest contribution to the \$50,000 project.

The “Safe Water for WV” project led by the West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WVRC) included a series of public forums, social media, educational tools, local partner network building and technical assistance to provide citizens with information on source water planning and their role in the process. A key activity was the development of a [“Citizen’s Guide to Drinking Water Protection.”](#)

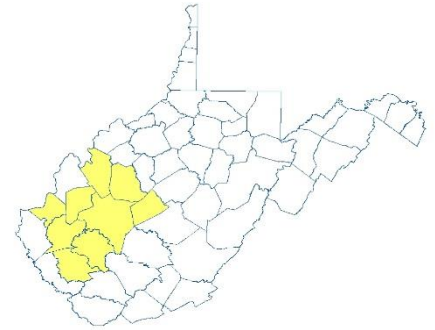
The overall goal of the project was to help protect drinking water supplies throughout the state by ensuring that watershed groups and other community stakeholders assumed a constructive role in the source water planning process.

A law passed by the state after the spill ([SB 373](#)) required public water systems across the state to draft or update source water protection plans with the public’s involvement. The plans are designed to help manage pollution from general sources that could endanger drinking water supplies.

Per WVRC, the Elk River chemical leak and ensuing water crisis was an awakening for many to the sources and vulnerability of their water supplies. It was the first time many people thought about where their drinking water comes from and the connection between watershed protection, public health and economic security.

Among the results of the Safe Water for WV project were five public forums attended by at least 345 community members, 72 local partners and 10 public water utilities. The Citizen’s Guide was distributed at the forum and was discussed in a statewide webinar.

WVDEP will use funds from its 2017 Section 319 grant award for a pilot project, which integrates Source Water Protection Plans and Watershed Based Plans in two watersheds.



AT A GLANCE

- Above: Counties impacted by the Elk River spill.
- Safe Water for WV project engaged citizens across the state after the spill.



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