



PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

1462 STRONGS AVENUE, STEVENS POINT, WI 54481 • PHONE: 715-346-1334

To: Portage County Municipalities

From: Tyler Kunze, Water Resource Specialist

Date: October 13, 2025

R.e.: Draft Portage County Groundwater Management Plan and Text and Mapping Updates to the Portage County Wellhead Protection Ordinance

Groundwater Management Plan

The Portage County Groundwater Citizen Advisory Committee (GCAC) has been working diligently over the past three years to update the Groundwater Management Plan. This Plan is scheduled to be updated every 5 years and was last updated in 2017. The Groundwater Management Plan is referenced by the Portage County Comprehensive Plan and represents the combined efforts of many individuals concerned with the wise management of Portage County groundwater resources. The purpose of the Plan is to provide information to the citizens and elected officials of Portage County and to guide their decisions regarding the use of groundwater, and detail how those uses will impact groundwater and surface water resources.

Please review and comment on the proposed amendments to the Groundwater Management Plan and provide comments in writing to the Portage County Planning and Zoning Committee by mail to the Planning and Zoning Department at 1462 Strong's Avenue, Stevens Point, WI 54481 or my email to kunzet@co.portage.wi.gov by Friday October 24 2025. Comments may also be made in person or via remote attendance the evening of the public hearing starting at 5pm on October 28, 2025. Please see the agenda and/or public hearing notice for meeting location details and remote attendance options. Materials and information related to this request will be available for viewing prior to the hearing date online at www.co.portage.wi.gov by clicking on the agenda packet for the Planning and Zoning Committee meeting in the agenda/Minutes Calendar.

Wellhead Protection Ordinance

The Groundwater Citizen Advisory Committee has also recommended revisions to the Portage County Wellhead Protection Ordinance. These revisions include map and text amendments. The Portage County Wellhead Protection Ordinance is a type of zoning ordinance with the stated purpose of instituting land use regulations and restrictions to protect the municipal groundwater supplies in the County. The Ordinance is applicable to the unincorporated areas of the County by establishing a Groundwater Protection overlay district. The Groundwater Protection overlay district is proposed to cover portions of the Towns of Amherst, Dewey, Carson, Eau Claire, Hull, Plover, Sharon, and Stockton. The major change in the proposed Ordinance is the change in area being regulated. The current Wellhead Protection Ordinance protects a portion of the municipal well recharge area up to the 20-year time of travel. The proposed Ordinance changes the regulated area

to protect the entire recharge area of the municipal wells, in some cases out to a time of travel equivalent to an estimated 75-100 years. This proposed change reverses the last Wellhead Protection Ordinance revision, which occurred in 2021.

Background / History of the Wellhead Protection Ordinance

In 1986 amendments to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) established a nationwide program to protect groundwater used for public water supplies through establishment of state wellhead protection programs. The goal of wellhead protection is for communities to identify and protect the land area that contributes water to their wells to prevent contamination of their water supply. Wisconsin's wellhead protection program, approved by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1993, is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Under the requirements of section NR 811.16(6), Wisconsin Administrative Code, all new municipal wells installed after May 1, 1992 must have a DNR approved wellhead protection plan (WHP) prior to placing the well into service. The WHP must include the following components:

1. Delineation – This includes direction of groundwater flow, zone of influence, recharge area, and the wellhead protection area.
2. Risk Assessment – This includes an inventory of potential contamination sources.
3. Wellhead Implementation – This includes a management plan, public education plan, water conservation plan, and contingency plan.

A Wellhead Protection Ordinance can be used as a tool by a City or Village to further the WHP by regulating land uses within its municipal borders. Counties or Towns are also able to establish land use controls outside of municipal boundaries for the same protection purposes. The DNR encourages local municipalities, including Counties, to create local ordinances that will help protect local drinking water resources while also supporting the state's wellhead protection efforts and regulations.

In 1988 the idea for a Wellhead Protection Ordinance was included in the adopted Groundwater Management Plan. In 1993 Portage County, along with the municipalities that are served by municipal wells, felt that county-wide and municipal wellhead protection ordinances afforded the best level of protection to drinking water sources that served Portage County residents. The Portage County Wellhead Protection Ordinance was created with the stated purpose to "institute land use regulations and restrictions to protect the municipal water supplies of the Village of Junction City, Plover, Whiting, and the City of Stevens Point and to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare of the residents of Portage County. This ordinance would help approximately 60% of Portage County's 72,139 residents in addition to benefitting those persons living outside the City and Villages which utilize the services provided by schools, churches, restaurants, and places of employment with municipal water supply. While the stated purpose of the Ordinance is to protect municipal well recharge areas; individual private wells in or near the Groundwater Protection Districts also benefit from the land use protections provided by the Ordinance.

Since the Ordinance was adopted in 1993, it has been revised once in 2021. This revision to the Ordinance included mapping amendments to add existing municipal wells which were not covered by the 1993 version of the Ordinance. These new wells at the time of the revision were the new Junction City well, Well #11 in Stevens Point, and all of Amherst's municipal wells. In 2021, the size

of the districts was amended, instead of protecting the entire recharge area of the wells in District C, District C now includes the 20-year time of travel area.

Proposed Amendments to Wellhead Protection Ordinance

As a matter of practice, Portage County periodically reviews the language and specifics identified within each of its ordinances to ensure that they are currently reflecting the needs and desires of the County Board and County residents. The proposed amendments to this ordinance will update mapping to include a new municipal well in Stevens Point that is not currently covered by the existing ordinance and to update existing Groundwater Protection Districts based on best available information as well as requests of the Planning and Zoning Committee.

Map Amendments

There are two proposed changes to the Wellhead Protection Ordinance maps. The main proposed change is reverting the area District C covers back to the entire recharge area for all the municipal wells rather than the 20-year time of travel. The second proposed change is to include Stevens Point's new well #12 in the mapping. These revisions have been unanimously recommended by the Groundwater Citizen Advisory Committee earlier this year. The proposed maps can be viewed in the Planning and Zoning Agenda Packet for the October 28, 2025, meeting one week prior to the meeting date.

Text Amendments

Earlier this year, in 2025, GCAC recommended approval of Wellhead Protection Ordinance revisions to revert certain text amendments back to previous permitted or prohibited uses along with reverting the area of District C to encompass the entire recharge area of the municipal wells. These changes are aimed at better achieving the stated purpose of the Wellhead Protection Ordinance. The proposed text amendments can be viewed in the Planning and Zoning Agenda Packet for the October 28, 2025, meeting one week prior to the meeting date.

Public Hearing Information

Please review and comment on the proposed amendments to the Groundwater Management Plan and the Portage County Wellhead Protection Ordinance text and maps once they are available on the Portage County website. Please provide comments in writing to the Portage County Planning and Zoning Committee by mail to the Planning and Zoning Department at 1462 Strongs Avenue, Stevens Point, WI 54481 or my email to kunzet@co.portage.wi.gov by Friday October 24, 2025. Comments may also be made in person or via remote attendance the evening of the public hearing starting at 5pm on October 28, 2025. Please see the agenda and/or public hearing notice for meeting location details and remote attendance options. Materials and information related to this request will be available for viewing prior to the hearing date online at www.co.portage.wi.gov by clicking on the agenda packet for the Planning and Zoning Committee meeting in the agenda/Minutes Calendar.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the text and maps, please contact Tyler Kunze at 715-346-1334 or kunzet@co.portage.wi.gov

