

# Won't You Be My Neighbor

By Shawn Stevenson

It seems today, more than ever, that establishing ideals and doing what's best for everyone is in the public eye. We all know the difference between right and wrong; but how often do we stretch the boundaries? Take for example the speed limit of your nearest local back road. Is the sign there just a suggestion? Honestly, who gets hurt by driving just 10mph over, or 20mph over and so on? Can you even watch television for more than twenty minutes without seeing a "do the right thing" commercial with a celebrity preaching some sort of common sense? If you were to take a poll of a set number of people and ask them if they considered themselves to be an upstanding citizen and a good neighbor; what percentage do you think would proclaim that they were both? Now ask yourself the same question! Although this may seem to be a loaded question, the defining circumstances of a particular situation can put someone's character in a true light. There will always be those who uphold the highest standard of integrity regardless of the circumstances and unfortunately those who fall way beneath the mark. The group that is most commonly referred to as average is where our focus will lie.

The context of this discussion could probably take a thousand different directions. But in this case it's going to relate to something very close to home. The topic I am referring to is jurisdiction and authority. This is something that everyone has an opinion on even if they don't know it. One place that we all have some say-so on is what happens on our own land. What a person does in their own backyard is their own business; right? Nobody likes to be told what to do especially on their own land. But let's consider something that binds us all together no matter how much of an individual we are; public health, and more importantly, water. Simply put, it is life; to everyone in this profession it's a living.

If you were to poll that same group of people on where their water came from how many would answer "from the city," or "public works department"? Water purveyors know that the answer is something quite a bit more complex. Depending on whether you have a surface or groundwater system the distances the water travels can be vastly different. In many cases the water

system does not own the land on which the water comes from. Take for example the typical surface water system in western Oregon. Watersheds can range from hundreds of square miles to single digits, but the common theme here is that the land above the intake usually belongs to someone else. Often the landowners upstream are not serviced by the water system down gradient from them. A common term for these individuals is a stakeholder. For a managing agency they are referred to as Responsible Management Authorities (RMA). The name stakeholder in this case is a misnomer. Because, quite frankly, people upstream have no direct connection to the water quality downstream; or do they?

The phrase "common sense" was stated earlier and how the typical land owner should apply this varies somewhat, but a few simple actions can make all the difference. We are all guilty of doing some questionable practices occasionally, but the transition in the way we do simple tasks is an easy one. The following Best Management Practices are nothing more than applying common sense to the home or workplace.

- Abandon old wells properly
- Dispose of oil and antifreeze properly
- Don't spray diesel on your weeds
- Keep livestock out of streams and riparian areas
- Follow pesticide and herbicide application rates
- Maintain your septic system-
- Have the system pumped every five years
- No phosphate products
- Store petroleum and chemicals properly
- Use a secondary catch basin on Above Ground Storage Tanks

So, what is the motivation for a landowner to potentially change some of the ways they manage their land? There are incentives via government agencies like the Farm Service Agency who can provide program funding in the form of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), as well as, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program

(EQIP) administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Landowners set aside portions of their cropland or buffer areas near streams, and these contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. Persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program (NRCS, 2007). Although the original intent of some of these programs was to help regulate the yield and prices of agricultural production they do have the ability to aid water quality. For those landowners who do not qualify, or wish to participate in such activities, their motivation is primarily good will towards the residents downstream.

One message that should be made clear is that there is almost always someone up gradient. Regardless if you have your own well, whoever is upstream, up gradient or in the vicinity, your aquifer has the potential to affect your water quality. Without a good water supply land prices tend to plummet. Even from a financial standpoint you are connected to your neighbors.

The dilemma of not having control of the area of source water origination is a common theme among water systems in our state both surface and groundwater alike. Truth be told this is one of the biggest hurdles in working to protect sources of raw drinking water. Decades ago treatment was thought to be enough, but now the reality has set in that treatment is only an individual cog of a bigger machine. Just the cost alone for reactive treatment or a spill clean up could impact the growth of a particular town extensively. New legislation such as the Groundwater Rule dictates the need for source water monitoring and identification of the contaminant source when certain contaminant detections occur. The need for source water management is going to continue to build momentum. As population increases and developments spring up, the need for a greater quantity of clean water is a harsh reality. Many water systems in Oregon are already running on the ragged edge in terms of production during the summer months.

The situation of working with the public and the Responsible Management Authorities for the purpose of protecting water quality is not as bleak as it might seem. In general the majority of people

and agencies in this state are willing to be a good neighbor. Many times they just need a little creative suggestion to do the right thing or at least be made aware of the source water area. Considering yourself or anyone else as just an insignificant piece of a big puzzle is the wrong approach. Every little bit helps and just a few changes in the practices around the workplace and homestead will make a world of difference. You unquestionably have the authority over your own land. So if you initially considered yourself to be a good neighbor then doing the right thing is already easy for you. Regardless if you are the professional in charge of the water system or just an average citizen upstream, we all live next to someone else. So welcome to the neighborhood!