



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## **GROUND WATER AWARENESS WEEK**

### **ARTICLE #5**

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#### **The Danger of Ground Water Depletion**

BISMARCK, N.D. – For some people, it is a hard lesson to learn: if you keep withdrawing money from the bank with no thought to the account balance, eventually you will overdraw.

It is the same way with ground water.

March 13 through 19 has been designated National Ground Water Awareness Week. In North Dakota, protecting ground water is one of the primary functions of the North Dakota Department of Health's Division of Water Quality. Ground water is found between soil particles and cracks in rocks underground, in formations known as aquifers.

“An aquifer can be compared to a bank account, and ground water occurring in an aquifer is analogous to the money in the account,” according to *Ground-Water Depletion Across the Nation*, a 2003 fact sheet by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The paper, authored by J.R. Bartolino and W.L. Cunningham, notes that the volume of ground water in storage is decreasing in many parts of the United States due to increases in pumping.

Some of the negative consequences of ground water depletion include higher well pumping costs, deterioration of water quality, reduction of water in streams and lakes, or even land subsidence (sinking).

Because it is an integral part of the earth's hydrologic cycle, ground water depletion can have a ripple effect. The hydrologic cycle begins when the process of evaporation releases water vapor into the atmosphere. The vapor condenses as it forms into clouds. This water returns to the ground through precipitation – rain. Water runoff soaks into the soil, penetrating deep into the ground until it becomes ground water, which is found in aquifers below the surface. Ground water flows through the ground until it discharges into a lake or stream. From there, the cycle begins again.

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USGS estimates that 140 million Americans (roughly half the population) in all 50 states depend directly on ground water for daily needs. Ground water accounts for 40 percent of the nation's public water supply and a significant portion of the water used for irrigation.

Government agencies such as the North Dakota Department of Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and national organizations such as the Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC) are working together to protect and conserve this valuable natural resource. For these agencies, and for ordinary citizens, monitoring ground water makes as much sense as balancing your checkbook.

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