How the Oklahoma Corporation Commission Can Help Rural Water Districts and Town Water Systems

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Abstract

The Oklahoma Corporation Commission has two programs to help public water supply systems – both rural water districts and town water systems – protect their surface and groundwater supplies, and locate new groundwater supplies.

First, under our rule 165: 10-7-6, “The Commission, upon application of any municipality or other governmental subdivision, may enter an order establishing special field rules within a defined area to protect and preserve fresh water and fresh water supplies”. Upon request, after public hearings to reach agreement on what is needed, we could among other restrictions:

- Require oil and gas drillers and operators to keep their operations a certain distance (such as ¼ mile) back from lakes and their supply tributaries;
- Require special pit liners, sizes, and other restrictions;
- Require berms downslope between the drill site and the stream/lake to prevent muddy (or possibly polluted) stormwater runoff erosion reaching surface water, or needed other erosion control measures;
- Require special surface casing lengths or cementing, to protect aquifers; or
- Require special commercial mud pit rules over aquifer recharge areas.

In addition, Corp Comm has begun to work with the Oklahoma Rural Water Association/Rural Water Districts, and would work with town water systems, to help them find the most favorable drilling locations for new water wells. The Commission has statewide data on the thickness of the fresh water zone. In addition, we have logs showing the depths and thicknesses of sandstone, limestone, and shale beds in hundreds of former exploration and oil/gas wells across the state. Wells drilled in areas where there are many possible water zones in 800 feet of section below ground surface are more likely to find good water producing aquifer zones than a well drilled where there is less than 200 feet of possible section, or where the logs show there to be no good water-bearing porous sand or limestone zones.