EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Groundwater governance and management practices vary considerably across the United States. To better understand groundwater governance strategies and practices connected to water quality in the United States, a team from the University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center designed and launched a nationwide survey in 2016. The goal of the project was to identify on-the-ground practices of groundwater governance that may help to improve and enhance management of the nation’s water supplies, particularly within the realm of groundwater quality. A state water professional was recruited in each state to participate in the nationwide survey. The report was prepared as a project funded by the Ground Water Research and Education Foundation (GWREF) of the Ground Water Protection Council and benefitted from the involvement of GWREF representatives throughout the formulation of the survey. The surveys were responded to online, with no in-person interviews conducted. This report presents major findings from the survey.

State water professionals identified a wide variety of groundwater concerns, including impairment of water quality and quantity, staffing and budget issues, health/vulnerability of private well users and aquifer overdraft. There are concerns about contamination of groundwater, especially in agricultural sites, but state professionals also expressed concerns about naturally occurring contaminants, underground storage tanks, Superfund/CERCLA sites, industrial sites, and septic tanks. Nitrate was the most selected contaminant of concern, followed by chlorinated solvents. More than half (53%) of respondents indicated that unconventional oil and gas exploration and production are occurring and regulated in their states.

Most respondents indicated the existence of explicit groundwater quality management goals in their states and have observed significant changes to groundwater quality policy in the last 10 years. Most states share groundwater quality data with a multitude of user groups. Most states have groundwater quality standards and a groundwater classification system.

States have multiple sources of funding for water quality programs, with 85% receiving some form of federal funds. However, for a majority of states, groundwater quality program budgets have decreased in the last 10 years. A majority of surveyed agencies describe the number of staff as too small. Some states rely on local and federal agencies to help implement groundwater quality regulations.

Looking to the future, respondents indicated a number of issues will require more attention in the next 10 years, notably water quality/water level monitoring and increased groundwater pumping. Almost half of states anticipate that changes in groundwater regulation are likely in the next five years.

This report is available upon request. Please contact jacobpp@email.arizona.edu for further details.