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## Soaking in the results

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As possible groundwater contamination dominated local headlines in 2005, one group of Gilford residents was busily working on ways to protect sources of drinking water for future generations.

Last Wednesday, the group presented a report on water assets, as well as possible threats to local freshwater, to the Gilford Board of Selectmen. The town's highest board praised the group's work and charged its members with continuing their project in 2006.

"I am really impressed with the extent of this report," said Selectman Dennis Doten.

The 12-member Drinking Water Protection Committee began its work — examining the dangers facing local water resources and the steps officials should take to protect freshwater — early last year. The group was formed through Gilford's Conservation Commission.

"We have identified nine different areas that we feel are possible problems," said Charles Boucher, the committee's chair.

First among those threats was the former-firefighter training site near Lily Pond and the Laconia Airport. The state Department of Environmental Services began its cleanup of that area last week. The cleanup project is expected to run through next spring, and should be completed in late 2006.

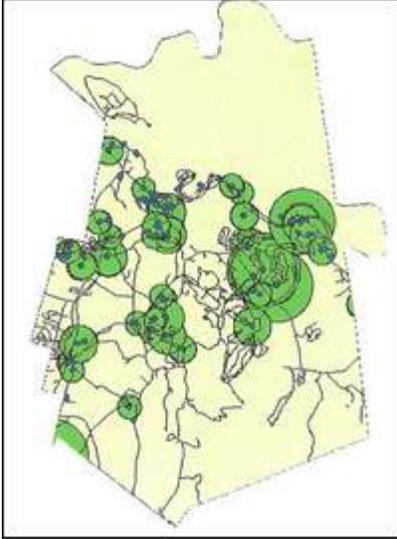
While contamination on the Laconia Airport site dominated headlines and drew local attention, the drinking water committee found that other possible sources of contamination could threaten water, as well. In fact, the group recommended to selectmen that the town adopt new ordinances regulating underground storage tanks, and establish stricter wellhead protections.

Four leaking underground storage tanks were found throughout the town, and only one of them was classified as having its "issues resolved." The other three — a Getty gas station, a Mobil station and the Mountain View Yacht Club — have all received attention from the state's environmental agency.

The report also identified 29 facilities in town, from landscaping companies to retailers, that store, manage or generate hazardous substances. It also identified six active "underground injection control" sites, or sites that can create a connection between the land's surface and groundwater.



GILFORD'S DRINKING WATER Protection Committee members, from left, Brian Denutte, Wade Crawshaw, Frank Leith, Lee Duncan, Chuch Coons, Chair Charles Boucher, Susan Oehlschlaeger, Pat Tarpey, Tim Drew, Chris Tierney, Jerry Gagnon and John Goodhue. (Courtesy photo)



**THIS MAP shows the public water supplies in Gilford. The dark green portions highlight wellhead protection areas while the blue dots illustrate public water systems. (Courtesy photo)**

Beyond that, the report indicates that road salt, boats and marinas, residential developments, septic systems, residential heating fuel storage, household hazardous wastes, lawn care products, septic systems, roads, railroads and other land uses present a significant threat to the town's drinking water.

But the report included good news, as well. The Department of Public Works has already established some "no salt" and "low salt" roadways. The department applies more sand than salt in those areas during the winter months. The Laconia Airport is working with the Conservation Commission to establish conservation easements for wetlands under its control.

But, the committee's report concluded, the need for greater protections remains. Key among the committee's recommendations are aquifer overlay districts. Such districts would prevent certain uses of land resting over Gilford's aquifers — namely, underground storage tanks.

The committee supports "grandfathering," or allowing some pre-existing uses.

An airport industrial zone, which includes the Laconia Municipal Airport, rests over the town's largest aquifer. Committee Secretary Chuck Coons told selectmen that such an overlay district would not force businesses or the airport to close, or prevent some expansion. It would, he said, prevent the use of underground storage tanks or other construction that could threaten drinking water.

When asked if measures could be taken to prevent leakage from underground tanks, Coons said, "Once you put the last shovel of dirt on top (of the tank), all bets are off."

The committee's report also recommends buffers of vegetation along lakes, wetlands, streams and ponds. Those buffers, the report indicates, would help prevent pollution from entering the water supply.

The committee's primary goal in the coming year will be to shepherd in greater protections for Gilford's water, according to the report. The committee will also pursue a cleanup of contaminated areas, follow technological improvements that could afford greater protections for the environment and help to develop emergency response plans to protect Gilford's water.