Five Year

Strategic Plan

The framework to propel Protect Our Aquifer into a phase of growth.
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"Clean water is one of our most precious resources in West Tennessee. We should be doing everything we can to ensure that it remains safe and clean for future generations."

- Sen. Brian Kelsey
About Protect Our Aquifer (POA)

Formed out of necessity in 2017, Ward Archer founded the organization thinking it would be a short-lived legal fight. It soon became apparent there is no entity working to protect the source of drinking water for Shelby County, Tennessee and much of the Mid-South. Protect Our Aquifer is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a force of citizen advocates challenging threats to the Aquifer. In four years, POA has become a leading voice in the science-based protection of the Aquifer and the people that depend on it. The organization serves as a critical tool to unify the diverse stakeholders of water management to Protect Our Aquifer.

Mission Statement

To protect, conserve, and preserve the Memphis Sand Aquifer.

Vision Statement

We envision the sustainable management of groundwater resources that will support the next seven generations living and working within the Mississippi Embayment.

“The aquifer is essential to the health and well-being of nearly a million Tennesseans and protecting this natural resource must be a top priority.”

- Sen. Ramesh Akbari
Values

Inclusion
welcoming all water users, races, and ethnicities

Integrity
protecting quality and quantity with science-driven decisions

Advocacy
creating fierce defenders of the water we need to thrive

Celebratory
acknowledging and applauding great stewards of our water

Objectives

1 - Build Water Advocates
Educate and empower individuals to take ownership of regional water resources.

2 - Strengthen Local Water Management
Work towards comprehensive water management in Shelby County, Tennessee.

3 - Promote Contamination Remediation
Prioritize sites and engage local, state, and federal entities to remediate groundwater pollution.

4 - Champion a Regional Groundwater Trust
Build a coalition of stakeholders to pass federal legislation forming a multi-state groundwater authority.

5 - Develop a Sustainable Organization
Secure continuous funding and meaningful community connections to propel POA into the next decade.
Work Plan and Priorities

As the organization transitions from a primarily volunteer-led workforce to a paid staff, the objectives have been broken down to a general list of priorities ranging from short- to long-term goals. The ending time frames are listed to direct staff and supporters as they work to accomplish the objectives. It is crucial that the Board of Directors still plays an active role in day-to-day operations as sustainable funding is secured and more staff can take on the workload.

1 - Build Water Advocates

Short-Term through 2022
1. Update and reorganize website with a portal for whistleblowers
2. Establish regular newsletter issues
3. Build advocate program starting with neighborhood associations
4. Develop Event Series: Traveling Aquifer 101 and local issues

Medium-Term through 2024
1. Expand Event Series: Activism 101, Annual State of the Aquifer
2. Host annual awards celebration acknowledging water stewards: industry partner, activist, utility water worker

Long-Term through 2026
1. Continue Event Series
2. Teach children and adults to value water through curriculum in schools, on-site laboratories, and engaging demonstrations.
2 - Strengthen Local Water Management

Short-Term through 2022
1. Revisit local water ordinances and regulations and establish a task force to delineate specific objectives and tasks.
2. Complete the Shelby County Health Department well regulations rewrite.

Medium-Term through 2024
1. Connect with West Tennessee counties within the recharge zone.
2. Seek County and State approval of legislative initiatives.

Long-Term through 2026
1. Monitor compliance of groundwater regulations and participate in all meetings.

3 - Promote Contamination Remediation

Short-Term through 2022
1. Identify priority contamination sites for public attention.
2. Work with CAESER, TDEC, and Shelby County groundwater board.
3. Conduct community awareness sessions.
4. Build dashboard of current cleanups and prioritize remediation.

Medium-Term through 2024
1. Secure funding and work with experts to achieve the heavy lifting of remediation, infrastructure improvements, and maintenance.
2. Train and connect residents to expert teams and government agencies involved.

Long-Term through 2026
1. Develop a remediation workforce encompassing all disciplines.
2. Facilitate the expansion of professional careers in remediation through educational programs and apprenticeships.
4 - Champion a Regional Groundwater Trust

Short-Term through 2022
1. Develop working group of potential participants utilizing TN H2O recommendations.
2. Coordinate with Tennessee watershed districts within the Mississippi Embayment.

Medium-Term through 2024
1. Extend working group membership to Mississippi and Arkansas participants.

Long-Term through 2026
1. Seek federal mechanisms for establishing a groundwater trust akin to Edwards Aquifer Authority.

5 - Develop a Sustainable Organization

Short-Term through 2022
1. Hire the first full-time Executive Director.
2. Conduct fundraising campaigns every three years.
3. Determine next staff positions, timeline, salary, candidate search.
4. Invite new Board Members representing diverse constituencies.

Medium-Term through 2024
1. Implement Board training program for effective leadership.
2. Establish POA office with public-facing space for educational engagement.

Long-Term through 2026
1. Develop sustainable funding sources.
2. Assess execution of this strategic plan and develop the next iteration beginning in 2027.