

Residents urged to safeguard area water

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POCATELLO — In Southeast Idaho, residents live, work and play atop the valley's sole source of drinking water.

During a presentation at City Hall Wednesday, Glenn Thackray, a professor in the geoscience department at Idaho State University, told city and county officials, as well as concerned citizens, that preventing water contamination is more cost-effective than cleaning it up.

Thackray said drinking water in Pocatello and Chubbuck

See Water, A5

Water

Continued from A1

comes from groundwater, which shows the negative effect of human activity.

Monitoring chemical storage in the Portneuf Valley is a good first start, he said.

Contamination at the Bannock County Landfill has cost the city and the county about \$5 million over the past 15 years, Thackray said.

He said cleanup at the landfill could take up to 40 years.

Nitrate contamination from septic tanks is a major threat for contamination, he said.

Thackray said the geology and the vulnerability of the Portneuf Valley Aquifer is unique.

Located in the Bonneville flood gravels, groundwater

travels quickly between large boulders while silt and contaminants also move and spread rapidly.

As part of the city's Comprehensive Plan, water sources will be identified and guidelines for protecting them established, Thackray said.

A citizen's advisory group will review the information and make recommendations prior to a series of public hearings during the upcoming year.

Wednesday's informational meeting helped officials and residents better understand that groundwater and surface water in the Portneuf Valley are two separate issues.

"We don't drink water from the Snake River, or the Portneuf," Thackray said.

Snowpack, mainly from the Mink Creek and Gibbon Jack drainages, melts, soaks into the ground, and eventually becomes groundwater.