

CHAPTER 6 – PUBLIC UTILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The utilities serving a community are an extremely important component of the services that define the “quality of life” within that community. Most counties in Kansas do not provide utility services per se, although many have recently become active in constructing and managing wastewater systems in portions of their county. All of the larger, incorporated cities within Marion County provide some level of utility service within their community, and in some cases have extended those services beyond their borders. In addition, there are “special” districts that provide utility-type services, most notably the rural water districts within the county, and the “improvement” districts at Marion County Lake and Marion Reservoir.

Other companies provide the remainder of utility services in the County are addressed herein.

WATER SYSTEMS

A number of Rural Water Districts have been formed within Marion County through the years and provide public water service to approximately 50% of the County. There are 4 rural water districts formed in Marion County, with portions of the rural area served by rural water districts formed in McPherson County, Harvey County and Butler County. The County government has no role in these systems other than to authorize their initial organization and approve additions to the service territory as outlined by statute.

Most of the cities within the county have their own water utilities and provide some limited service beyond their borders. However, as these cities grow, conflicts between city utility services and rural water district “franchise” territories will present major problems. This could be a major issue Hillsboro. This long-term impact often was not taken into account when previous approvals were given to establish or expand the rural water districts. But it is an issue that may become a very serious, contentious issue in the future. This topic should be taken into account if any future expansions of rural water districts are proposed in close proximity to any cities.

WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Except of a couple of local “improvement districts” formed primarily for wastewater systems at developments at Marion County Lake and Marion Reservoir, Marion County has not ventured in to the “utility” business. The “improvement districts” are governed by a separate Board that does not report to the County. To date, these all have been to primarily provide sanitary sewer services to existing development, with limited provisions made to accommodate expansions for new development. This may not always be the case and the county should clearly establish a policy regarding such proposals.

Most of the cities within the county provide sanitary sewer service within their respective cities with very little, if any, sewer service beyond their borders. For the most part, the cities are not as willing or able to extend sewers due to limits on treatment capacity.

TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES

As noted earlier, traditional telephone services are available throughout the entire county from Southwestern Bell Telephone or Craw-Kan Telephone. In addition, a number of the cellular telephone companies have constructed towers and are providing mobile phone services to a good portion of the county, but the coverage is not as extensive and complete. In time, this will change as more towers are constructed to provide the service coverage that is mandated by the FCC for most of these carriers. The proposed placement of these towers can often be an issue for surrounding landowners and, in most cases, the proposal should be subject to zoning approval. The county should clarify within its Zoning Regulations appropriate standards for the construction and use of communication towers and facilities within the rural areas in order to mitigate the impacts associated with such development.

FIGURE 11: MARION COUNTY RURAL WATER DISTRICT MAP

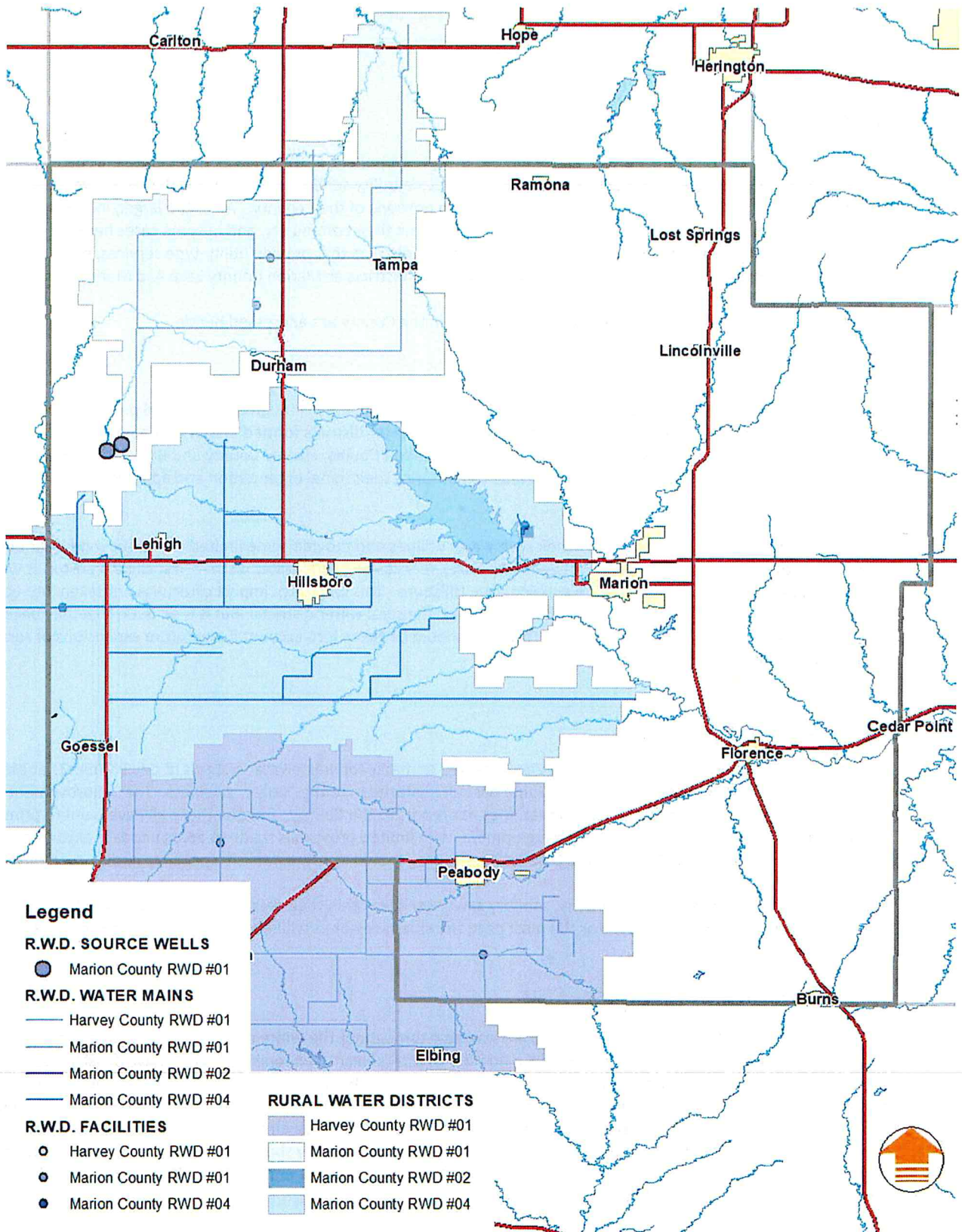
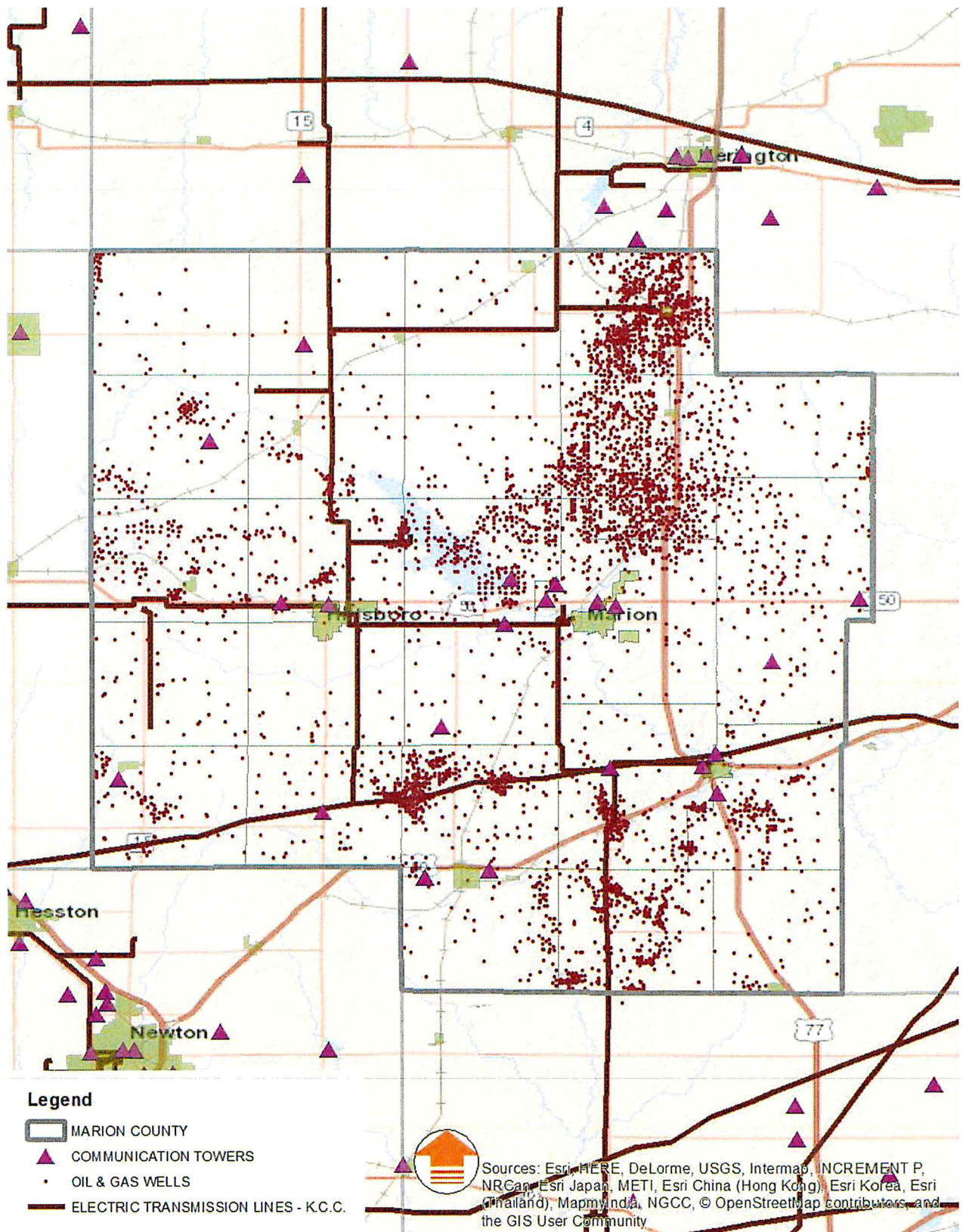


FIGURE 12: OIL WELLS, COMMUNICATION TOWERS & ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION LINES MAP



OTHER UTILITY SERVICES

Electric and gas service is also provided by private utility companies throughout the county. These are adequate and capable of providing services meeting all demands in the planning period.

Other utility-type services are available within the county as well. In particular, advanced television services from some cable operations just outside some of the cities, and satellite services are available. These should be capable of expanding to meet demand with no additional oversight by the county.

The citizen's have expressed considerable interest in seeing expanded and/or enhanced internet services within the entire County. While it is not the direct responsibility of the County to provide those services, County officials should continue to work closely with providers to determine what might be done to see the implementation of such improved services.

Another utility activity which has garnered significant interest and discussion by Marion County has been the development of commercial wind energy systems, or wind farms within certain portions of the County. Recent modifications were made to the Marion County Zoning Regulations to permit such developments into a larger area of the County. The previous Comprehensive Plan was particularly focused on this issue and had resulted in special a zoning classification with a restricted area for development of these systems. Changes in other factors since the previous Plan resulted in those changes to the Zoning Regulations; however, the County should remain vigilant in educating itself on what is actually happening within this industry. Between taxing classification changes by the State of Kansas, to technological changes in the industry, to power production requirements by state and federal regulatory agencies, the only "known" at this time is everything associated with this industry will change.

More about commercial wind energy systems, or wind farms will be discussed in the Future Land Use element.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

The greatest planning implications to the county will be the impacts associated with water and sewer service demands as the rural areas of the county continue to grow and change. Specific policies should be established with the cities and others in the business of providing these services in order to understand the long term implications of future demands for additional services. The main objective is to assure that as decisions are made they will serve the best interests of the citizenry, both now and into the future. The opportunity to make the right decision is only available at the time these decisions are made. Failing to take into account the long term consequences has often cause much more trauma for future generations than to make a tough decision at the proper time.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

US-1 GOAL: PROMOTE THE EXTENSION OF UTILITY SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE SAFE AND AFFORDABLE UTILITY SERVICES TO THE RESIDENTS OF THE COUNTY.

USO-A OBJECTIVE: Encourage the delivery of public water services to as much of the county as practical. Continued development utilizing on-site water supplies is not in the long-term best interest of the county nor its citizens.

TIMEFRAME: On-going.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: Marion County, all cities, rural water districts, realty companies, lenders, builders and developers.

USO-B OBJECTIVE: Assure the adequate provision of water and sewer facilities and services in coordination with growth areas identified in the Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan. Areas beyond the city limits receiving infrastructure improvements from those cities should be considered for annexation to those cities in the near future.

TIMEFRAME: On-going.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: Marion County, all cities.

USO-C OBJECTIVE: Update and enhance the Environmental Codes of Marion County to assure the standards and requirements for on-site water and wastewater systems promote the purpose and intent of the Comprehensive Plan.

TIMEFRAME: On-going.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: Marion County, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, realty companies, lenders, builders and developers.

USO-D OBJECTIVE: Continue to work with providers to expand and enhance internet service to all area of Marion County. Coupled with this is a commitment to support expansion of infrastructure to enhance cell phone coverage; recognizing there are different providers involved.

TIMEFRAME: On-going.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: Marion County, internet and cell phone providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance the utility services within Marion County, the following recommendations are given.

1. The county should amend its Environmental Codes to enhance its standards and requirements for on-site wastewater treatment systems and encourage the use of more technical systems that provide actual treatment of the effluent.
2. The county should amend its Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, where necessary, to assure it is properly evaluating the impacts of proposed new rural residential developments with respect to demands for utility services.
3. The County should continually review the Zoning Regulations to assure requirements concerning placement and development standards of communication towers, commercial wind energy systems, and other structural placements supporting all utility services are adequately addressed.