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DISTRICT ADOPTS MANAGEMENT PLAN AND CHANGES TO DISTRICT RULES

The Board of Directors and staff have worked for several months on an update to the District Rules and Management Plan, now required by the enactment of Senate Bill 1. During formulation of the Management Plan, we looked at both surface water and groundwater resources for our District, and plans for the next fifty years. Following the hearing on Wednesday, March 18, 1998, the Board of Directors of Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District No. 3, adopted the proposed Management Plan, as amended, and the changes to the District Rules. The following is a brief outline of the most notable changes.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

(as required by §36.1071, Texas Water Code)

The overall management goal is to have at least 50% of current water supplies still available after fifty (50) years. The Board believes that this is an acceptable rate of depletion. Inside the District boundaries, there are over 4,200 irrigation wells capable of producing water from the aquifer, to meet the needs of the agricultural community. The District has 94 municipal wells, 63 industrial wells, and numerous non-permitted domestic and stock wells, to meet the needs of public water supply, domestic, industrial, and oil and gas secondary recovery (water flood) operations.

Currently, the Ogallala aquifer contains approximately 68,050,000 acre feet of water, in storage. District wide groundwater usage is estimated to be 228,859 acre feet per year and projections indicate there will be 265,760 acre feet of usage per year, by 2050. Taking into consideration the 50% goal to be retained in storage, this would give over 160 years supply, District-wide. However, localized shortages are expected in some areas of the District where heavy pumpage for agricultural and municipal use, continues to occur.

The main goals of the Management Plan are to better understand groundwater conditions, to encourage the most efficient use of the groundwater, to conserve and improve groundwater quality, to improve the recharge of the aquifer, to increase public awareness and education, and to monitor legislative activities and rules and orders of state agencies that might affect private groundwater property rights.

DISTRICT RULES

(re-organization of current rules)

1. District-wide well registration, which will require the registration of all wells in the District. A survey will be sent to all landowners in the near future, requesting information on non-permitted wells.
2. The implementation of an aquifer depletion rule, which will require the study, and possible regulation, of all wells depleting the aquifer faster than the acceptable decline rate set by the Board. This rule requires the study of areas that show high depletion, in an effort to understand the reason for the accelerated depletion.
3. The addition of a larger well classification to the current minimum spacing rule. This rule would require a greater spacing distance on any well that produces more than 1300 gallons per minute.
4. A comprehensive revision of the hearing process. This change was implemented to give the public more orderly input in the District's activities.

Interested persons may obtain a copy of the Management Plan and/or the District Rules, by calling 806/883-2501, or drop by the office, 201 W. 3rd St., White Deer, Texas.

WATER PLANNING GROUP MEETS

The Panhandle Water Planning Group held their second meeting at the Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District office in White Deer, Texas, on Tuesday, March 24, 1998.

Regional water planning groups were mandated by Senate Bill 1, of the 75th Legislature. Members of the groups were to be nominated by various interest groups and charged to represent eleven interest groups: agricultural interests, counties, electric generating utilities, environmental interests, industries, municipalities, public, small businesses, river authorities, water districts, and water utilities.

The Panhandle Water Planning Group covers twenty-one counties in the Texas panhandle: Dallam, Sherman, Hansford, Ochiltree, Lipscomb, Hartley, Moore, Hutchinson, Roberts, Hemphill, Oldham, Potter, Carson, Gray, Wheeler, Randall, Armstrong, Donley, Collingsworth, Hall, and Childress.

Members of the Water Planning Group, and the interest group they represent, are: public, Therese Abraham, Canadian; counties, Judge Vernon Cook, Miami; municipalities, Dan Coffey, Amarillo, and David Landis, Perryton; industries, Bill Hallerberg, Pampa, and Michael Nelson, Borger; agricultural, Frank Simms, Panhandle, Jimmi Vivens, Childress, Janet Tregellas, Booker, and B. A. Donelson, Stratford; environmental, Nolan Clark, Bushland, Robert Jacobson, Adrian, and Trish Neusch, Amarillo; small businesses, Rusty Gilmore, Dalhart; electric generating utilities, Gale Henslee, Amarillo; river authorities, Jim Derington, Spearman, Red River Authority, John C. Williams, Sanford, C.R.M.W.A., and Bobby Kidd, Clarendon, Greenbelt Water Authority; water districts, Richard Bowers, North Plains GCD, Dumas and C. E. Williams, Panhandle GWCD, White Deer; water utilities, Charles Cooke, Borger.

At this meeting, By-Laws were adopted and the following officers were elected: C. E. Williams, Gen. Mgr., Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District, chairman; Hon. Vernon Cook, Judge, Roberts County, vice-chairman; Dan Coffey, Asst. Dir. of Utilities, City of Amarillo, secretary; John C. Williams, Gen. Mgr., Canadian River Municipal Water Authority, at large; and Nolan Clark, Director, USDA-Agricultural Research Service, at large. The Panhandle Regional Planning Commission was selected to be the designated political subdivision for administration and coordination of the Group.

The regional water planning groups will provide for the development, management, and conservation of water resources and preparation for, and response to, drought conditions, in order that sufficient water will be available, at a reasonable cost to ensure public health, safety, and welfare; further economic development; and protect agricultural and natural resources of the regional water planning area. The water planning group must prepare, adopt, and submit a regional water plan to the Texas Water Development Board by September 1, 2000. These approved regional water plans will be incorporated into a comprehensive statewide water plan that will be adopted by the TWDB.

The next meeting of the Panhandle Water Planning Group is scheduled for April 27, 1998, at the North Plains Water Conservation office, 603 East First St., in Dumas. These meetings are open to the public.

If you would like more information about the Panhandle Water Planning Group, you may contact the Panhandle Ground Water office, (806)883-2501.

SIERRA CLUB FILES SUIT

The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club (plaintiffs) have filed a federal lawsuit to protect the Arkansas River shiner. The suit, which was filed in New Mexico, seeks to force U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to decide on the protection of the tiny minnow.

The shiner was once abundant throughout the Arkansas River and its tributaries, but has disappeared from almost 80 percent of its historic range and is currently found mainly in the Canadian and South Canadian Rivers in Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed that the shiner be added to the endangered species list in 1994. Congress imposed a moratorium on such actions, but the moratorium was lifted in April 1996. USFWS was supposed to make a final decision on the listing of the shiner by, April 30, 1997.

Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), worked out last year between the USFWS, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and Oklahoma Department of Wildlife (ODWC), the USFWS may list the shiner as threatened instead of endangered. The Texas appendix to the MOU outlines the actions the state agency should undertake, to conserve the species and the conservation strategies that do not require regulations or restrictions on the use of groundwater from the Ogallala. Also, it doesn't require releases, except those for which there are voluntary agreements, from Lake Meredith, which provides water to eleven area cities. Existing (i.e., traditional, in the sense that they are on-going) agricultural and land management activities, as currently practiced adjacent to occupied Arkansas River shiner habitat in Texas, will not be adversely affected, as part of developing and implementing conservation strategies. The MOU was signed by TPWD and ODWC in May of 1997. The plaintiffs recommend restrictions on the use of groundwater from the Ogallala Aquifer, to protect the shiner.

According to Gary Graham, endangered resources branch chief at TPWD, the department's most recent data shows the shiner is abundant in the Canadian River west of Lake Meredith, but less abundant east of the lake. He also said there is little or no scientific connection between the pumping of the Ogallala and surface water flows in the Canadian River.

The suit asks that the Court enjoin the defendant, to take final regulatory action regarding listing the Arkansas River shiner as threatened or endangered, and issue a proposed rule regarding the designation of critical habitat for the shiner within 30 days of the Court's order, and to take final regulatory action regarding critical habitat within 90 days of the proposed rule's publication in the Federal Register.

The District is monitoring the suit very carefully and we are encouraging the USFWS to sign and implement the MOU, because it conserves the species with consideration of the private landowners rights. The District will take whatever appropriate action is necessary, to protect the water rights of the citizens.

CITY WATER ASSESSMENTS

The District staff has completed the city water assessments for the towns within the District. These assessments were written by the District with a grant from the Texas Water Development Board, and with the cooperation of the cities.

The purpose of the assessments is to estimate each city's current water consumption and water supplies, to ensure that there are enough water resources to meet future demands. Virtually all of the cities rely on the Ogallala aquifer. Unfortunately, the Ogallala is being depleted faster than it is being recharged. Therefore, water conservation is essential to extend the life of the aquifer.

Both oral and written reports were presented to the city councils of each city. They were informed of how much water they have used historically, how much water they have in storage, how long their groundwater resources are predicted to last, and how the city and its citizens can conserve water.

The following table shows estimates of how long the water supplies are predicted to last for each city. These estimates are worst case scenarios since groundwater recharge was not accounted for. District staff suggested where the cities might drill wells if they need more water in the future.

If you have any questions about the city water assessments, or if you would like to learn how you can conserve water, please contact the District at (806)-883-2501. Remember that the figures below are only estimates and not absolute predictions.

City	Years Projected Supply will Last
Claude	46
Groom	65
Lefors	21
McLean	25
Miami	185
Mobeetie	174
Panhandle	77
Shamrock	37
Skellytown	30
Wheeler	19
White Deer	63

WATER CONSERVATION LOANS NOW AVAILABLE

Funds are now available for the Agricultural Water Conservation Equipment Loans. Interest on these loans will be 6.22 percent. This money is to be used by farmers and ranchers within the District, to install more efficient water conservation equipment. Money is lent on recoverable parts only, requires 20 percent down, and may be loaned for up to eight years. A loan packet, containing guidelines for applying for a loan and an application form, is available at the office. Call (806)883-2501.

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There is no substitute for water.
When the well runs dry, there
is no more.



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