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Panhandle Water News

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WATER PLANNING METER INSTALLATION

An integral component to the Regional Water Plan for the Panhandle Water Planning Area is the development of a comprehensive, computer groundwater model of the Ogallala Aquifer in the region. The model is essential, due to the fact that the vast majority of the water consumed in the region comes from the Ogallala Aquifer. Several models of the aquifer have been developed in the past, but often either concentrated on particular segments or are updates of older models. To accurately determine both the quantity of the water in the aquifer and also the rates of withdrawal or use, the Panhandle Water Planning Group believes it is essential to develop a comprehensive model of the region using modern computing platforms, programming, and locally generated input data.

The locally generated input data will be gathered through the installation of approximately 150 water flow meters on agricultural wells throughout the region. Agricultural wells are being selected for this data gathering effort for two reasons: most groundwater in the region is consumed for agricultural purposes and other types of wells, notably municipal and industrial wells, are already metered and the data reported to the appropriate state agencies. PGWCD general manager, C. E. Williams, stated, "The District believes that the estimates overstate agricultural water use. In order to verify this, we are sponsoring a research program to determine actual water use in selected areas." The study plans to gather data on crop type, actual amounts of irrigation water applied/pumped, rainfall, changes in static water levels, and crop cycles. Rain gauges and fixed flow meters will be used to gather information for this study. The study is intended to run for a minimum of two years.

In order to get the most accurate picture possible, the two largest groundwater districts in the region, the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District and the Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District will be responsible for selecting the wells to be metered and also for installing and monitoring the meters. The two groundwater districts are actively working with local landowners and operators to gain the permission and access required to conduct the program. Participation by landowners and operators is strictly voluntary, and the data gathered will be used as an input to the Regional Groundwater Model. To date, approximately 50 meters have been ordered and installed. Metering the selected agricultural wells to determine actual pumpage numbers is essential to the development of an accurate model and is the only way to determine actual, rather than estimated, amounts of water pumped.

Actual development of the Regional Groundwater Model will be performed by the Bureau of Economic Geology (BEG). The Bureau's project manager for the Regional Groundwater Model is Dr. Robert Mace, who is a specialist in groundwater modeling and who has developed models for several local entities during past projects. The BEG was awarded the contract to develop the Regional Model at the Panhandle Water Planning Group's January meeting. The BEG was selected on the basis of a competitive RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process and presentation to the Planning Group.

More metering sites are needed. Meters can be installed at the well or pivot and will be used to show the total water pumped at the current pumping rate or flow. Installation will be at no cost to the owner and, after the study is completed, the meters will become the property of the farmer. The individual well locations and amounts produced will be kept in strictest confidence, to insure each individual's privacy. In order to participate, please call the District office, 883-2501.

PWPG UPDATE

by Jarrett Atkinson, P.R.P.C.

Since the January 26th meeting, most of the Planning Group's activities have centered around contracts and associated issues. At this point, the PWPG Consultant Committee has reviewed, negotiated and approved a sub-contract between the Bureau of Economic Geology (BEG) and Freese-Nichols, Inc. (FNI). In addition to these two prime contracts, the committee has reviewed, negotiated, and approved a sub-contract between FNI and the Texas A&M University System (TAMUS). Each approved contract has an associated budget, and the Committee has reviewed and negotiated each of these. The final step remaining in the contracting is to have each of the above agreements approved by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). Once TWDB approval is received, the contracts will be considered valid and in-force.

As mentioned above, each contract and sub-contract has an associated budget. As a result of the negotiation process, there have been slight changes in the budgets as compared to the budgets contained in the Scope of Work (SOW). Primarily, these variations are due to the fact that when the SOW was prepared, the state rules required each region to contribute 25% of the total cost of the plan as "matching funds". However, this requirement was changed, and there is no "match" requirement per se. At this time, the state rules require the regions to pay all the non-direct costs associated with the plan while the state will pay all direct costs. Due to this rule change, which was very favorable to the region financially, the consultants will now be doing more of the planning work than originally forecast. The change in the budgets does not remove or limit the ability of local entities to perform work for direct compensation or to receive compensation from the consultants for activities such as data gathering, etc.

Another item, which has been addressed since the January 26th meeting, is the purchase of the well meters needed to help develop the Regional Groundwater Model. A key feature of the Regional Water Plan for this area is the creation of a truly regional model of the Ogallala Aquifer. A necessary component of the new Regional Groundwater Model is accurate input data. In order to accumulate this data, the SOW calls for the purchase and installation of approximately 150 well meters on agricultural wells throughout the region. A contract has been awarded to Great Plains Meter of Marion, TX to supply the needed meters. The Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District and the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District will be identifying landowners who are willing to have these meters on their wells and will also be responsible for the installation. Information obtained from these meters will be used for the development of the Groundwater Model to ensure an accurate and true depiction of the status of the Ogallala Aquifer. To date, 50 meters have been ordered and the Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District has begun installation.

The collection of local funds needed to finance the non-direct costs of the planning process is proceeding very well. To date, over \$100,000 of the needed \$125,000 has been received. The Planning Group will hear an update on this process during the March 23rd meeting.

Several pieces of favorable legislation have been filed this session. The three bills which are of primary interest at this point speak to the liability issue, the designation of the regional planning groups as a governmental unit, an extension of four months to prepare the Regional Plans, and the removal of the requirements to plan for partial droughts. Other bills have been filed which may impact the process, and these will be monitored as they develop.

AG LOAN FUNDS STILL AVAILABLE

The District still has funds available, at 6.22% interest, for the purchase of low pressure irrigation systems, in-line flow meters, surge flow valves, and aluminum or plastic above-ground pipe to replace open unlined ditches. Loans require 20% down and can be made for up to seven years. For more information, call the office, 806/883-2501.

76TH LEGISLATURE IN SESSION

The District's manager, C. E. Williams, and other members of the Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts have been spending considerable time in Austin tracking and testifying on water related bills, as they progress through the session. The following is a brief profile of the House and Senate Bills of the most interest to our group.

- HB 34 by Goolsby. Relating to the regulation of professional geoscientists;
- HB 109 by Alvarado. Relating to prohibiting the severance of surface rights from groundwater rights in conveying real property;
- HB 340 by Walker. Relating to the exemption from permitting requirements for certain wells in a groundwater conservation district;
- HB 846 by Lewis. Relating to the administration, management, operation, and authority of water districts and authorities;
- HB 982 by Williams, and HB 1520 by Junell. Relating to the publication of ad valorem tax rates for small taxing units;
- HB 1592 by Junell. Relating to the state's share of the costs under the brush control cost-share program;
- HB 1848 by King. Relating to the composition of the Texas Groundwater Protection Committee;
- HB 2199 by Chisum. Relating to the authority and name of the Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District Number Three, South of the Canadian River;
- HJR 17 by Chisum. Relating to limiting the aggregate ad valorem tax rate on property;
- HJR 24 by Talton. Relating to imposing term limits on state, district, and local elective offices;
- SB 305 by B. Brown. Relating to contracts by school districts, institutions of higher education, and state agencies for water conservation measures.
- HB 533 by Puente and SB 143 by B. Brown. Relating to the priority of a water right authorizing a transfer of water from a river basin in this state to another river basin in the same regional water planning area;
- SB 272 by B. Brown. Relating to regional water planning groups;
- SB 657 by B. Brown. Relating to the development of water management strategies for periods of drought;
- SB 658 by B. Brown. Relating to the dates by which regional and state water plans must be adopted.

Numerous bills have been introduced relating to the creation, powers, duties, and financing of new water districts. Among those are Upton County, Trans-Pecos, Blanco County, Brewster County, Bastrop-Lee Counties, Presidio County, Robertson-Brazos, and Jackson County.

**HIGH PRODUCTION PERMIT HEARING
HELD FEBRUARY 24**

Approximately thirty interested landowners attended the public hearing held by the PGWCD Board of Directors, on February 24, 1999. Purpose of the hearing was to receive public testimony from the owners of land adjoining the water rights being purchased by the City of Amarillo for municipal and industrial consumption. The City has requested High Production Permits on four separate tracts, with construction not to commence within a period of 25 years. The amount requested is as follows: Tract 1 (Morrison/Peacevale, Morrison, F. Morrison, Howell) 33,977 acre feet per year; Tract 2 (Chisum) 2,554 acre feet per year; Tract 3 (Abraham) 6,026 acre feet per year; Tract 4 (Moody, Bell, Clark, Cameron) 28,640 acre feet per year.

C. E. Williams, District manager, explained that the City of Amarillo has requested a permit to produce one acre foot per surface acre from the water rights area in Roberts County. He explained that the way our rules are written, it will actually be four separate permits because we recognize the area in a contiguous boundary. This insures that they will not take the total water from one particular area, but will spread it out over the whole area. He also explained that the City bought these rights for future use and will not use them for at least 25 years, and possibly longer than that. The permit will not become effective until the City of Amarillo receives the title transfer of the described water rights located in Roberts County.

In drafting the permit, the District tried to be fair to the adjacent landowners, as well as to the City of Amarillo. When they begin drilling production wells, the City will be required to meet the District's spacing requirements at the time. A half-mile buffer around the perimeter of each tract is required, and a network of monitoring wells must be established before actual pumping can begin. The permit will be under the continuing supervision of the District and they must file a conservation plan with the District, prior to pumping.

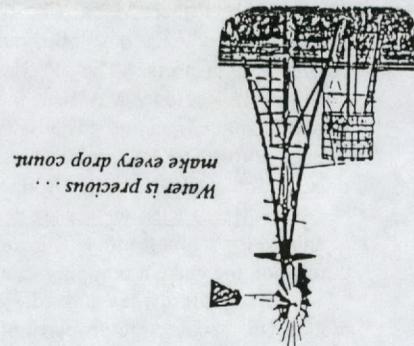
Concerns voiced by the landowners present included windmills drying up, the effects of the Ozarka Suit on our District, the buffer zone around the tract perimeters, whether future Board members will abide by the permit, an economic impact study, hydrological studies, the current rate of depletion, and water quality.

John Spearman, Board president, reminded those present that Texas State Law gives landowners the right to produce and capture water. It is the duty of the Board to protect the water, but we have to do it according to the law. The water district affords some protection for the landowners. Our depletion rule insures that no one can completely deplete any area of its water, but we cannot deny anyone a permit, as long as it meets the rules of the District.

Mr. Williams told those present, "The District is making a concerted effort to balance everything. To us, the landowners' water is just as important as the City of Amarillo's project, and vice versa."

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