

Pumping limits defined

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Limits on how much water comes up are going down for some parts of the county.

The Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District board set new pumping limits Wednesday afternoon that will decrease limits for some and increase them for others.

Headwaters general manager Gene Williams said the pumping limits will make permitting more equitable.

All wells will be permitted by historic use and service needs of the supplier. When no historic-use information is available or a new system comes online, the board will allow reasonable use up to 80,000 gallons per acre in all aquifers except the Edwards aquifer.

If the need exceeds 80,000 gallons per acre, the board will need to approve the increase. These limits will apply to all permitted wells including public water systems that use groundwater only, public water systems that use groundwater and surface water, irrigation, mining, golf courses, ranching and businesses.

In January, the board set pumping limits according to what aquifer the well was drawing from with limits ranging from 40,000 gallons per acre per year for the Middle and Lower Trinity aquifers to up to 115,000 gallons per acre for the Hensel North.

Three members of the board — Gordon Morgan, Diane McMahan and John Elliot — commended Williams on the equitable pumping limits.

But Headwaters president Mary Ellen Summerlin was concerned about allowing up to 80,000 gallons per acre in areas such as Center Point and the Upper Turtle Creek area where aquifers showing low-water readings.

Summerlin questioned what would happen if a large developer decided to build in the Center Point area with a high density and proposed a public water system that would require at least 80,000 gallons per acre or more.

"I'm afraid, if we set the limits at 80,000, then we are not taking into account those areas that are not producing as much water as needed," she said.

Kerr County resident Larry Richter told the board a developer likely would perform his due diligence before moving ahead with a project.

"He would make sure the resources are adequate," he said, " and most likely hire a hydrologist. These people invest millions of dollars in these projects, and they want them to be successful."

Summerlin also was concerned about allowing 80,000 gallons per acre for irrigation, mining, golf courses, ranching and businesses, and she made a motion to exclude these from the proposal.

She said people should be the premium when allowing water, and she "just can't square it," to allow 80,000 gallons per acre for those uses.

However, the rest of the board disagreed citing the new pumping limits would be equitable for everyone, and her motion failed. The pumping limits were then passed by a 3-1 vote, with

Summerlin dissenting.

Pumping limits apply only to wells that require a permit, which applies to commercial, agricultural or public water supply. There were 10 permitted wells and approximately 200 exempt wells applied for last year. Household wells are exempt from regulation by state law. They are approved and recorded by the district but not regulated as long as they meet the State's definition of "domestic use."

No permitted wells will be allowed to draw from the Edwards aquifer, which is the aquifer from which the Guadeloupe River springs. For the Edwards, the limit is simply that only domestic wells are allowed.

New pumping limits apply to permitted wells drilled this year and also to permitted wells which come up for renewal of their five-year permits this year.

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