

Blanco County News

Regional News

Don't Allow This Opportunity To Go To Waste

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This summer, Central Texas is experiencing an “exceptional” drought, the highest intensity of drought as categorized by the U.S. Drought Monitor. Drought means less rainfall to recharge to our underground aquifers and it can also result in higher groundwater pumping demand. As a result, water levels in Hill Country wells are declining and springs are running dry. It's bad this year, but we've seen worse. Back in the 1950s, it took more than seven years for the rains to finally replenish drought-stricken parts of Texas.

Frequent drought, combined with population growth, means that we must proceed with great caution in planning for the future of the Hill Country and its groundwater resources.

A few years ago, Texas legislators put a process in place to give local groundwater conservation districts the chance to decide how they want their aquifers - underground water reserves – to look in the future. The groundwater stored in these aquifers naturally supplies people's wells, springs, and in many cases in the Hill Country, a good portion of the flows of local creeks and rivers.

Through this Groundwater Management Area (GMA) process, local districts have the opportunity to shape the future of these essential natural resources, and everything that depends on them, by deciding what the area's aquifer will look like in the future. With public input, the districts are given the leeway to adopt a goal, termed a “desired future condition,” for each aquifer under their management. The goal can range from preserving water levels in the aquifers, to protecting springflows, to allowing for the aquifer to be depleted over time.

The Hill Country area, Groundwater Management Area 9 (GMA 9), encompasses all or parts of Kerr, Blanco, Hays, Kendall, Bandera, Medina, Comal, Travis and Bexar counties. It also includes the Sabinal, the Medina, the Blanco, the Pedernales, and the Guadalupe Rivers. It includes countless springs and creeks lined with fishing spots and swimming holes. It includes booming natural tourism offering hunting, birding, fishing, and outdoor oriented activities which beckon tourists and locals alike to come enjoy the wonders of the Hill Country. It includes a hot real estate market that spotlights “live water” as a selling point.

It also includes a rapidly growing population that is projected to continue growing well into the foreseeable future. Some area water managers are advocating that the desired future condition of the aquifers be set to meet all of these projected demands, at existing water use rates. That is,

they assume we will be continuing our current wasteful water use patterns even as the population of the area doubles over the next few decades. If adopted, such an approach would mean steep declines in groundwater reserves across the Hill Country, and maybe even perpetual drying of springs and creeks that now flow in all but the most severe droughts.

In fact we are already seeing a preview of what might happen if this approach is adopted. Back in the summer of 2000, Jacob's Well, a continually flowing spring that supports the flows of Cypress Creek in Wimberley and boasts a rich history that dates back to a sacred place for native Americans and a draw for early settlers, stopped flowing for the first time in recorded history.

Are more depressing scenarios like this one, really our "desired future condition"?

The current GMA process provides an important opportunity to shape the future of our Hill Country groundwater resources and guarantee that they remain a viable resource into the future. But that will happen only if Hill Country landowners and those of us city dwellers who enjoy its springs, creeks and rivers get involved and ensure that aggressive water conservation and other measures are used to reduce future groundwater pumping demand.

Groundwater conservation district contact information is available at www.texasgroundwater.org. More information about the groundwater management area process is available at www.texaswatermatters.org/groundwater_gma.htm.

Don't let this opportunity to preserve the future of our Hill Country groundwater resources go to waste. With sensible management and creative conservation, we can ensure both the economic and environmental prosperity for this unique area of the state.

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