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Groundwater Group Makes Recommendations That Would Lower Aquifer Levels

AUSTIN — Groundwater Management Area 8, which covers a 45-county swath of Texas stretching from north Austin to the Oklahoma border, recently finalized its “desired future conditions” for the aquifers in its region. Many of the group’s recommendations would significantly deplete local groundwater supplies.

“This process was created so local groundwater managers could decide how much water they wanted to leave in the aquifer for their children and grandchildren,” said Laura Marbury, Texas Water Project Director of the Environmental Defense Fund. “Instead of deciding where they would like water levels and spring flows to be in the future, as the law intends, in most cases they simply accepted the predicted pumping scenarios as the ‘desired future conditions.’”

Lowering the water level in

aquifers can impact the water levels in existing wells and can decrease flow from springs, where the aquifer’s water flows into creeks and rivers.

In some areas of the Trinity group aquifers, water levels would be drawn down as much as 500 feet. In the Woodbine aquifer, draw downs would reach 350 feet in places. For the northern portion of the Edwards Balcones Fault Zone aquifer, the adopted desired future conditions would dramatically decrease spring and creek flows in Williamson and Travis Counties, as well as the flows of Salado Creek in Bell County.

“These large water level reductions could have a significant impact on the natural water resources and quite possibly the future economic well-being of the region,” said Marbury. “Is this really the future condition the public

desires for these resources?”

The groundwater management area (GMA) process was created by House Bill 1763 in the 2005 legislative session. The law gives districts the leeway to adopt a measurable goal, termed a “desired future condition” for each aquifer under their management. The goal can be a particular water level in the aquifer, a volume of spring flow, or even a degree of water quality over time.

“It’s not the job of the GMAs to decide how to meet all the projected future water demands, it is their job to protect the aquifers,” added Marbury. Texas has a separate regional water planning process which identifies strategies to meet the state’s future water demands. Results from the GMA process feed into these regional water plans.

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