

Aquifer study funded by USDA

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ALPINE, Texas- Subsurface water along the Rio Grande and in far West Texas is the subject of a new research project by several universities.

The study, to begin in June, will gather groundwater data and data on drainage basin management and remediation as well as how to clean up contamination, said Kevin M. Urbanczyk, associate professor of geology at Sul Ross State University.

He said the study, funded by \$1.8 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for this year, will be spread among Sul Ross, Southwest Texas State, Lamar University, Sam Houston State University and Angelo State University.

Urbanczyk said Monday that a similar, USDA-funded study is being done by Texas A&M University and New Mexico State University.

Matthew M. Uliana, an assistant professor, told about 100 people at the Espino Conference Center that area aquifers are the focus of attention by businesses that want to make money.

State officials were considering a proposal by Midland-based Rio Nuevo to drill for water in 355,000 acres in Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis and Presidio counties. Rio Nuevo has said it will provide \$2 million for research and would allow the state to hire contractors.

But a land commissioner argued that no water should be exported until research is done to ensure that no ranching or farming communities will be harmed.

"There's a big danger that people will get in there and start developing well fields before we really know what the impacts are going to be," Uliana told the Odessa American in Tuesday's editions.

Robert E. Mace with the Texas Water Development Board said the study will take about three years. He said not much research had been done in West Texas because of the sparse population and the complex web of aquifers that run through the region.