

Dropping aquifer levels force pump repairs

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Falling aquifer levels are starting to cause problems for Kerr County property owners.

Local well service companies have seen a sharp increase in burned out well pumps in spots where the water table has fallen below the pump depth.

Not only are local residents being left without water, but the expense of lowering or installing a pump can stretch to thousands of dollars. It could cost more if the water level has dropped below the well's bottom.

Installer Jerry Beard of Kerr Country Pump said Tuesday that the biggest problems his company has seen are in the east end of the county — from Creekwood, just east of Kerrville, to Stoneleigh Road in Center Point. However, in the last week they also have been called to residences in Upper and Lower Turtle Creek, Camino Real and Lillian Drive.

"It is getting to the point it's a very serious problem," Beard said.

"A well we did yesterday on Lillian we lowered 50 feet to 20 feet off the bottom of the well," he said. "The water level had dropped 60 to 80 feet."

Beard said the wells his company has worked on are at a range of lot sizes and don't all belong to people who are watering their grass. "This isn't playing any favorites," he said.

Japonica Water Well Service co-owner Cy Vlasek said her company has lowered at least 30 wells in the last three weeks.

"About 30 percent have burned up," she said. "There is no water, because the tables have dropped."

Vlasek said wells with problems are both old and new and are located in the Edwards or Middle Trinity aquifers.

"We have some people on the South Fork of the Guadalupe River who have lost 80 feet in their well," she said. A well pump for one customer was lowered 80 feet in that area.

She said a 440 foot well on Upper Turtle Creek was lowered an addition 40 feet to its maximum depth. If the water levels fall below that, a new well will have to be drilled, she said.

A wider problem

The current drought now is in its 18th month, said Feather Wilson, Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District consultant geologist. Problems being reported by Kerr pump installers also are being faced in other counties, including Kendall, Bandera, Llano and Gillespie, he said.

"The farther south is where most of the pumps are having the biggest problems," he said "What I call the Hensel North (aquifer) in the Mountain Home area seems to be holding up fairly well."

Wells being monitored along the Guadalupe River are the worst hit, according to Headwaters measurements, Wilson said. The concentration of population is a big factor.

"That puts a bigger stress on the aquifers," he said.

Water levels likely will continue to drop as long as there isn't recharge from rainfall. Wilson said most of Kerr County's recharge comes from Kimble and Gillespie counties in the north. However, with area counties running at 6 to 8 inches below average rainfall, recharge will be low, he said.

The only way around the problem is conservation. Public water systems in Kerr County have been ordered to reduce consumption. However, exempt private well owners have no legal limitations placed on them.

"People need to conserve water," Wilson said. "If you water your lawn all day, you are going to create problems for yourself."

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