

Who's watching your water?

Proposed groundwater conservation district on Lavaca ballot

- VICTORIA ADVOCATE

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HALLETTSVILLE – James Pohl has had a change of heart about a groundwater conservation district for Lavaca County.

He voted against establishing a district seven years ago, as did the majority of voters in the county, but in 2008, he believes strongly that county residents now need someone looking out for their water rights.

"I was against it back then because there was no imminent danger of anyone taking our water. Now there is," said Pohl, referring to the San Antonio Water Supply System's interest in obtaining groundwater from nearby South Texas counties to accommodate its growing population. Private water suppliers, too, are making inquiries in surrounding counties about buying water from private property owners.

Pohl added that groundwater districts now also have a track record.

"We know a lot more now about them than we did then," he said. "Back then, I was concerned that the state was going to come in and take control of our water. This actually gives us local control."

In the 2001 election, water districts were approved in DeWitt, Fayette, Goliad, Jackson, Matagorda, Refugio and Wharton counties. Voters in Colorado County joined Lavaca County voters in turning down a groundwater district.

Pohl's comments came after Tuesday night's "Workshop on Water" held by the proposed Lavaca County Groundwater Conservation District temporary board of directors. The Texas Legislature created the temporary district through House Bill 4029 in June 2007. Lavaca County voters will go to the polls in a special election on May 10 to decide if the district will become permanent.

Frances Pohl thought Tuesday's meeting was a good step.

"I was pleased with the turnout and the response from the audience," she said. "There were some good questions asked. It is essential for Lavaca County residents to hear all the information they can about the groundwater district."

About 75 people attended the meeting at Wied Hall between Hallettsville and Shiner including Lavaca County Judge Ronnie Leck, Tim Andruss, general manager of the Victoria County Groundwater Conservation District and one of that organization's directors, Kenneth Eller.

Taking part in the workshop were Rima Petrossian from the Texas Water Development Board

Barry Miller, general manager of the Gonzales County Underground Water Conservation District, and Ed Sullivan, vice-president of the Water Protection Association from Gonzales County. Also speaking was Pamela Hohman of Caldwell County who helped spearhead a drive to get 891 landowners in her county annexed into the Gonzales County groundwater district.

Miller began his presentation with a question for the audience.

"Who's watching your water?" Miller asked, going on to explain that the Gonzales County Underground Conservation District is protecting the landowners in the county. Miller emphasized that a groundwater district "is local people making the best decisions they can to watch your water."

"Are there any possible demands on Lavaca County water that someone needs to watch? Right now no one is watching your water. No one is tending to your planning. That would be one benefit of a groundwater district," said Miller.

There is some opposition to the permanent formation of the groundwater district in the county including from Lavaca County Taxpayers, Inc. At its annual meeting in Oct. 2007, members of the group were encouraged to vote against the groundwater district.

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There will be three propositions on the ballot for the May 10 special election in Lavaca County. Early voting begins April 28.

Proposition 1 For or Against the creation of the Lavaca County Groundwater Conservation District.

Proposition 2 For or Against The approval of an ad valorem tax not to exceed 5 cents per \$100 valuation which will provide funding for the district to be able to protect and preserve our water.

Proposition 3 Election of directors, one from each precinct and one at-large. All temporary directors are running unopposed. They include: Pct. 1, Larry A. Svetlik, Pct. 2, August "Boyce" Etlinger, Pct. 3, A.J. Cerny, Pct. 4, J.C. Hermes Jr., and at-large, David Myers.

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