

Concerns about groundwater future aired

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The Daily Times

Published September 2, 2008

A large crowd packed the Groundwater Management Area 9 meeting Friday in Kerrville to discuss future conditions of the area's aquifers.

Groundwater experts from nine counties - Bandera, Blanco, Comal, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, North Bexar, North Medina and South Travis - are developing a plan for the aquifers for a 50-year period.

In 2005, the Texas Legislature required groundwater conservation districts in groundwater management areas to meet and define the desired future conditions for groundwater resources by 2010.

Several in attendance expressed concern about the process that GMA 9 is using to determine the future conditions - specifically that the 1950s "drought of record" is not being considered.

GMA 9 determines future conditions by running data through groundwater availability models.

Attendees were concerned the drought of record numbers were not being put in the models.

The 1950s drought was catastrophic in Texas and affected every part of the state. It began in 1949 and did not end until 1956. Streams only trickled or dried up. Well levels dropped substantially.

Jennifer Walker of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club spoke about the drought of record numbers.

"You must perform a drought of record analysis in order to determine your future conditions," she said. "I think it is very important to do that kind of analysis."

Many speakers echoed those words.

GMA 9 Coordinator Ron Fieseler said they are considering those numbers even though they are not in the models.

"The drought of record has always been a part of our technical and scientific discussions," he said. "A comparison of the results indicate that spring flows cannot be maintained at the requested level during the drought of record even without pumping."

This means that if the Hill Country experienced a drought like the one in the 1950s, wells would run dry and spring flows would virtually stop.

This could spell disaster for the Hill Country because of a surge of growth in residential and commercial development, according to several in attendance.

One man who spoke during public comment suggested putting a moratorium on issuing new water permits for wells until desired future conditions can be determined.

Several people felt GMA 9 should hold off making any decisions until more data could be collected.

"The bottom line is I don't think you have the information and knowledge to do anything today on desired future conditions," said Kerr County Precinct 3 Commissioner Jonathan Letz. "I think you need to back off a little bit, take a little time and try to refine the desired future conditions. It is dangerous for any county to piecemeal these conditions."

GMA 9 did approve desired future conditions for three Blanco County aquifers - Ellenburger, Hickory and Marble Falls. They also approved future conditions for the Edwards Trinity Plateau, but did not for the Upper Glen Rose (Upper Trinity) aquifer.

GMA 9 is scheduling at least two public meetings to discuss three model runs of the area's aquifers.

"These model runs are complex enough when viewed alone, and will need extra effort in order to compare them with each other," Fieseler said. "The GMA 9 committee is working diligently to accomplish the goals of the state of Texas-mandated GMA planning process. We are very serious about protecting our precious water resources

"After all, we have a vested special interest in these matters. We live here, too."