

Houston Chronicle

Water district hopes to set new rules for water usage

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Resources

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District is expected to adopt new draft rules in October for managing the county's underground water supply. A public hearing and adoption of the rules tentatively are scheduled for November. Following are four areas that will be addressed:

Amenity lakes

A two-tiered enforcement system

Rebate of fees for unused water for water suppliers

Consolidating reporting requirements

Source: Lone Star Groundwater District

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District plans to hold a meeting later this month to decide the future fate of amenity lakes and ponds in the county.

The district, charged with managing the Montgomery County's underground water supply, is in the process of adopted revised rules for the use of water from aquifers, which could include rebates for unused water, a two tiered enforcement system, and restrictions on amenity lakes. After a committee presented its recommendation Tuesday, the Lone Star board began debating the issue of amenity lakes that use groundwater.

"We're updating and picking up things like amenity lakes," said Orval Love, president of the Lone Star board. "As we grow, there are needs for other things."

Amenity lakes are often added to developments for aesthetic appeal only. Some lakes and ponds use the county's groundwater supply to maintain water levels due to evaporation. With a dwindling supply of water available in the county, some question whether this is an appropriate use of the county's sole drinking water supply.

The district rules and bylaws committee recommended that permits be required for any amenity lake greater than one-third an acre if it relies on groundwater from domestic wells.

The board will hold a workshop on the issue to determine if amenity lakes will be permitted in the future, if there should be size restrictions and if liners should be require, said Brian Sledge, an attorney for the district.

In addition to amenity lakes, the new rules proposed that water suppliers be reimbursed fees for the amount of groundwater they are not using. Currently, water suppliers pay for water based on their permitted amount, not what they actually use.

"I think water suppliers are only using about 65 percent of their permitted amounts," Love said.

The water district issued permits for about 80,000 acre feet of water to be taken from three aquifers under Montgomery County. Those aquifers can be replenished at a rate of 64,000 acre feet a year. An acre foot is equal to 325,851 gallons. Water suppliers are under a mandate to reduce their reliance on the aquifers by 30 percent by 2015 and convert to a surface water sources, such as Lake Conroe.

Another change proposed is in the area of enforcement. The proposal includes a two-tiered system, with more rigorous rules and higher fees for repeat offenders.

"The biggest problem is that we have repeat, habitual offenders," Sledge said.

The new draft rules are expected to be adopted in October, with a public hearing planned in November. The new rules could be adopted as early as the November meeting, said Kathy Jones, general manager of the district.

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