

Published: September 10, 2008 12:07 pm  

## Water committee to meet Sept. 16

**By Natalia Jones**

Due to a 1990 study of Cooke county's groundwater problems by the Texas Water Commission and the Texas Water Development Board, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) was appointed to monitor the area.

In June 2007, TCEQ released a report which recommended that 13 of the 20 North-Central counties who use the Trinity and Woodbine Aquifers become a designated Priority Groundwater Management Area (PGMA).

According to TCEQ's official website, a PGMA is an area in which TCEQ has determined has had critical groundwater problems including groundwater shortages, land subsidence resulting from groundwater withdrawal and contamination of groundwater supplies.

The purpose in designating a PGMA is to ensure the management of groundwater in areas of the state with critical groundwater problems.

As a result, commissioners voted yesterday to create a Cooke County Groundwater Conservation Committee which will meet for the first time at 1 p.m. on Sept. 19 in the Gainesville Chambers' meeting room. Although the meeting will not be open for public discussion, AgriLife extension agent Wayne Becker said anyone who would like to sit-in is welcome to attend.

Committee members will include representatives from the 18 water providers in the county, one person to be selected by commissioners to represent individual well owners in the county and Becker.

"The charge of this committee is to get Cooke county unified and to take action so that we can decide what kind of GCD we want to be a part of, rather than letting TCEQ decide for us," said Becker.

Precinct 2 Commissioner Steve Key said it is well over due for the county to start considering water management options.

"When you start looking at the potential growth expected to occur in North Texas in the next few years combined with the drop we've already seen in the Trinity Aquifer, we should have been looking towards something like this sooner," said Key.

On Sept. 2 Administrative Law Judge Carol Wood recommended that "a single, regional, fee-funded groundwater conservation district (GCD) (could) effectively manage groundwater resources in the PGMA counties of Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson and Johnson."

She added in her analysis that "evidence shows that none of the eight counties, standing alone, would be able to generate sufficient revenue through well production fees to adequately finance a GCD's resource management activities."

However County Judge Bill Freeman said it would be a nightmare if Cooke county was forced into a single GCD with other counties.

"If we're allowed to be in a single GCD, then Cooke County would be able to control its own

groundwater destiny," said Freeman. "This is critical for the long range effects of our ground water, which is our very existence here in Gainesville."

Key added that a single GCD for Cooke County would have to be either tax or fee-based, but if done well, would affect citizens "very little" and would only be "a small burden."

Both Freeman and Key shared a mutual fear of the effects of a shared GCD with other counties, particularly larger counties such as Dallas or Denton.

"Urban growth in the suburbs of Dallas and Fort Worth are dipping into well water that we depend on in Cooke county," said Key. "If we could stand alone, that would be preferable."

There are four ways to form a GCD, Wayne explained. Either TCEQ can "stick you in one, landowners can petition for one, a Texas state legislator representative can propose a GCD which then would have to be passed by the county through an election, or a county could be made an addition to a pre-existing GCD."

TCEQ has two years to form a GCD, said Wayne, unless one of the other measures prove to be successful.

"I see this committee as an action committee," said Wayne. "We need to get together and take action so that we can control what kind of GCD our county will have."

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