



## **Groundwater district working to set plans for all aquifers in area until year 2060**

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— By Kelly Young

[kyoung@jacksonvilleprogress.com](mailto:kyoung@jacksonvilleprogress.com)

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Representatives from the five groundwater conservation districts in Groundwater Management Area 11 will meet today in Nacogdoches to decide what their next step should be as they continue their state-mandated charge to set Desired Future Conditions for the year 2060 for all aquifers within the area.

Of the 27 counties in GMA 11, only seven are governed by a groundwater conservation district. The other 20 counties are in what's considered "unprotected" counties, and state law dictates the groundwater districts are also responsible for setting the Desired Future Conditions for all unprotected counties in their GMA.

General Manager Roy Rodgers of the Neches and Trinity Valley Groundwater Conservation District — of which Cherokee County is a part — said the state's deadline of September 2010 is fast approaching.

"One of the things we are going to discuss is hiring a hydrologist to help us set the DFCs. We have groundwater availability models already done for the entire area, so the hydrologist will just have to use those existing studies and the state water plan to come up with DFCs that we can live with," Rodgers said. "We've got estimates running anywhere from \$15,000 to \$25,000 for a hydrologist right now, and the districts would be sharing that cost."

The Pineywoods Groundwater Conservation District, which incorporates Angelina and Nacogdoches counties, has already decided to fund its own hydrologist, which means it won't be contributing to the cost.

If the districts decide to move forward at this time with a hydrologist, they will issue a request for proposals so a vendor can be selected and the work can begin.

“After receiving all of the proposals we would need to call another joint meeting in order to approve the hydrologist. If we can get someone selected quickly, I would think we will be ready to set the DFCs by this time next year,” Rodgers said.

Of the state’s 16 groundwater management areas, only one has completed its work and submitted DFCs for each of its aquifers. Another one has set conditions for some, but not all, of its aquifers. Rodgers said the rest are all at varying levels of completion.

“This is a pretty huge task. The progress of the other GMAs really runs the gamut; some are in pretty good shape like us, and others are well behind us in being prepared for the deadline,” he said. “We might not be finished in a year from now, but I’m certain we can meet the deadline of September 2010.”

The Neches and Trinity Valley Groundwater Conservation District was one of many entities to petition the state in an effort to extend the DFC deadline beyond 2010, but no bills were introduced in this legislative session to do so.

Once the conditions document has been created, Rodgers said the districts of the GMA-11 would then have to review it every five years to make any needed changes. He said the district is taking every effort to ensure GMA 11’s DFCs are “scientifically-based, reasonable, don’t create economic problems in East Texas and can be defend if somebody wants to appeal it.”

The district will also be asking the Texas Water Development Board to reverse a decision made in 2004 which determined that a swath of land containing Smith, Gregg and Harrison counties was not a Priority Groundwater Management Area.

“If that area, which includes Tyler, Longview and Marshall, was made into a PGMA, it would basically force them to either create a new groundwater district or join into an existing one,” Rodgers said. “They are the major water-users in our GMA, and there should be a district in those areas so there can be some control over what they do. It’s very important that we have as much information as possible from these high-usage areas because the draw-down caused by their pumping radiates out into the surrounding counties.”

The Neches and Trinity Valley district will meet Thursday afternoon for the purpose of conducting the district’s business, and will hear from Rodgers regarding the actions taken at Tuesday’s joint meeting.

Other agenda items include:

- approval of the minutes from previous meetings;
- approval of the independent financial audit for Fiscal Year 2008;
- setting a time for a public hearing concerning the District Management Plan;
- approval of the 2008 Financial Investment Report; and
- paying the bills.

The Neches and Trinity Valley district's board of directors meets as needed at 1:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month, at their offices at 212 S. Main St. in Jacksonville. All meetings of the NTVGCD are open to the public.

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