

Verdict still out on GMA9 measurement tool

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The cases have been made and the jury is out until next year on whether water management guidelines established by the Groundwater Management Area 9 are an accurate measure of local water supply.

On Nov. 2, representatives of Kerr County, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority and Region J addressed representatives with the Texas Water Development Board, presenting their arguments against current methods used by GMA 9 to measure the amount of water in the Edwards Aquifer, saying the methods used are based on flawed sampling techniques that fail to evaluate the entire area encompassed by the aquifer.

Kerr County Commissioner Jonathan Letz, who testified against the GMA 9 method at Monday's hearing, said the GMA 9 only uses core samples from a single well to determine spring flow for the entire region.

"The problem is, there is no way to correlate spring flow from monitor well samples," he said. "The results from the well are not an accurate representation of the Edwards aquifer, which is geographically diverse and cannot accurately be predicted by a single sample from one location."

Letz said spring flow measurements are the most accurate way to measure water available in the aquifer. He said that the GMA 9, which was created by the Texas legislature in 2005 to help coordinate a statewide water management plan, is using the simplest way to measure available water amounts, rather than the most accurate method.

The GMA 9's task was to determine a desired future condition for the aquifer. But at last week's hearing, representatives for the county, UGRA and Region J said the method used and the result derived would have a disproportionately adverse impact on Kerr County than other counties in the GMA 9 that don't rely as much on the aquifer.

Documents from the UGRA argue that a spring flow study of the Aquifer would show Kerr County could use nearly 16 times as much water as the GMA 9 plan allows.

Additionally, Kerr County is looking for another victory over GMA 9, arguing it violated the Texas Open Meeting's Act last August when establishing desired future conditions for the Ellenberger and Hickory aquifers.

At the appeal hearing, acting Kerr County Attorney Ilse Bailey said that when the conditions were set by the GMA 9 at that meeting, it

overreached.

The meeting agenda, which by law has to be publicly posted in advance of the meeting itself, said "Discussion and possible action on Blanco Pedernales GCD proposal to set Desired Future Conditions for the Ellenberger, Hickory and Marble Falls aquifers in Blanco County only."

But Bailey said the GMA 9 ultimately passed a resolution that set desired future conditions that were not limited to Blanco. Because of the inaccurate posting, Bailey said all actions at the meeting would be voided.

Both sides were given 90 minutes to present their arguments for and against the current method. Transcripts of the testimony and supporting documents will be delivered to the Texas Water Development Board. The board is expected to render a ruling on the appeal when they meet in January.

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