



Panhandle Water News

SPECIAL EDITION

Points of Interest

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Conservation Area
Hearing

GMA 1 Hearing

H2O4Texas
The Water Event

Economic Impact
Study

DFCs & GMAs
Explained

PGCD Conservation/Study Area Hearing

Cars lined the streets around Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District's (PGCD) office on November 10, 2009 for the public hearing about the Depletion Management Program's proposed Conservation and Study Areas within the District.

The hearing was held to allow District constituents to give comment on the new Study Areas being proposed and the possibility of Conservation Areas being put in place. Approximately 90 people attended the hearing to show their interest in this important matter.

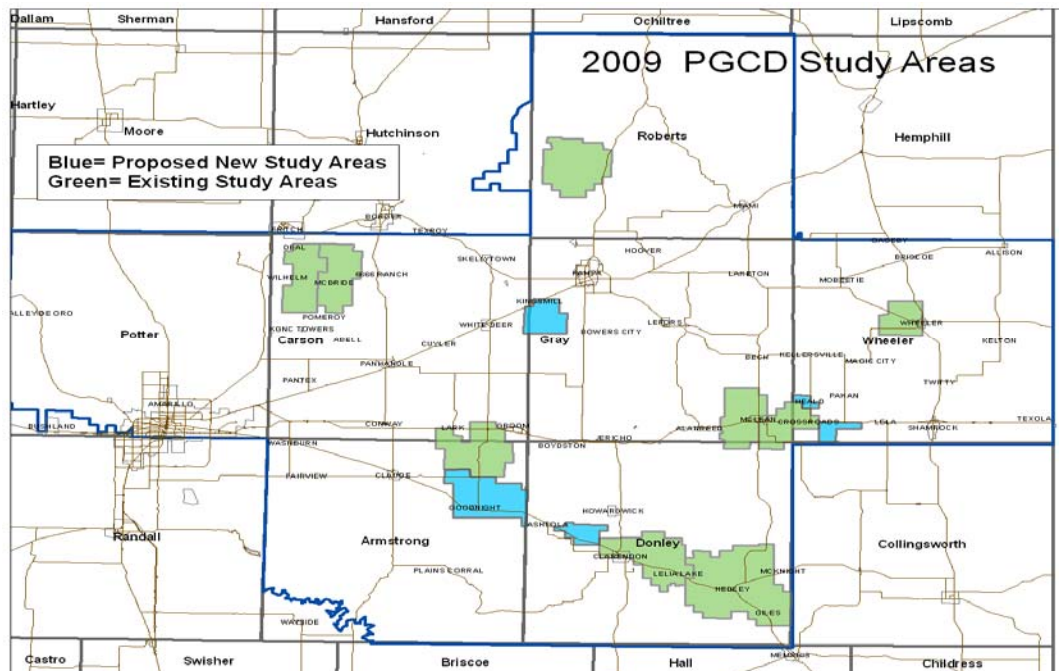
A Study Area is an area within the District that has exceeded the acceptable rate of decline of the water table. The zones that were proposed to be Study Areas have seen decline exceeding the 1.25 percent annual acceptable decline based on the five year rolling average of water level measurements. If a Study Area is declared by the Board of Directors the District begins monitoring the wells in that area more frequently. The increased number of measurements taken allows the District staff to verify the decline in the water table.

A Conservation Area can be designated by the Board of Directors for an area if it has been in a Study Area for two or more years and the decline exceeds the acceptable cumulative decline. This requires meters to be installed and production to be reported. If the Board determines that the area is continuing to exceed the acceptable rate of decline the production rate can be scaled back by 0.1 acre-foot per acre every two years until compliance is achieved.

The two proposed Conservation Areas were in Southwest Roberts County and Southeast Donley County near Hedley.

The portion of Roberts County was left as a Study Area in order to collect more data. Canadian River Municipal Water Authority (CRMWA) controls all the wells in this area and meters are already in place. Kent Satterwhite, General Manager of CRMWA, attended the hearing and stated that CRMWA was aware of the decline in the area and they are working to spread out the pumping in their new well field in order to mitigate the depletion in that area.

(Continued Pg 2)



Understanding GMAs and DFCS

In 2005, House Bill 1763 created the structure for collaboration among local groundwater districts in shared aquifers. Now the process guided by Chapter 35 of the Texas Water Code has grown to include setting Desired Future Conditions within a Groundwater Management Area using water consumption data, regional planning tools and aquifer characteristics. This process is applied throughout the state to cover all of the aquifers of Texas. Some of the specifics of the process are explained below.

Groundwater Management Areas (GMA) – were defined by the Texas Water Development Board in 2001. In these GMAs groundwater districts are required to work together to set a DFC for each aquifer.

Desired Future Condition (DFC) – is a quantifiable future groundwater condition. Groundwater districts try to look ahead to set a desired amount of water left for the aquifers in their district. DFCs help to set management goals and give an indication of what we want the aquifer to look like in the future.

After a DFC is set for a GMA, management plans and rules for implementations are required by each district to ensure the goals that have been set are achieved.

GMA 1 covers 18 counties in the Texas Panhandle and has set a DFC for the Ogallala aquifer and the Rita Blanca aquifer. GMA 1 is made up of Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District, Hemphill County Underground Water Conservation District, part of High Plains Underground Water Conservation District No. 1, and North Plains Groundwater Conservation District.

For more information about GMAs, DFCs, the process that created them, and their guidelines please visit <http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/GwRD/GMA/gmahome.htm>.

Economic Impact Study in Progress

Since the spring of 2009, PGCD has been collaborating with Texas Tech University and Texas AgriLife Extension Service to study the possible economic impacts of various levels of water restrictions on irrigation. This study will be done by combining a groundwater availability model with an agricultural economic model.

The three year project is being funded by a grant from the Texas Water Development Board. The models will examine the impact of the “50/50 standard” at the county, sub-county and farm level.

Justin Weinheimer from the Texas Tech Agriculture and Applied Economics Department has previously conducted a study like this in the southern part of the Ogallala Aquifer.

In September, Weinheimer held a meeting at PGCD’s office to gather accurate information about the economics of farming in this area. He will take this data along with other hydrologic information to analyze the impact of a depletion management program.

PGCD is working to complete this project to evaluate possible impacts of the depletion management plan within the District.



Concerned community members at the hearing at PGCD’s Office.

(Continued from Pg 1.)

Numerous people weighed in on the possibility of the Conservation Area near Hedley. The Board heard comments both in favor of and against the Conservation Area.

Several people were in favor of the implementation of a Conservation Area. These people have seen an increase in the amount of irrigation systems and a decrease in the live water in their area. They are hoping to preserve their water. Three people who could not attend the hearing wrote or called in to have their opinions in favor of the Conservation Area read into record. Newt Scott, a Donley County landowner, spoke at the hearing to express his concern for water in the area and his support for the Board in taking the necessary steps to protect our water.

Many others were against the idea of a Conservation Area. Bob White, a Donley County producer, stated he thought some of the data from the District was inaccurate; he would like to work together with PGCD to compile accurate data and then take another look at the area in 2010.

The producers concerns over the implications of a Conservation Area prompted them to volunteer to work together with the District to gather data.

After hearing all the testimony from 13 people the Board decided to leave the area in Southeast Donley County as a Study Area for an additional year; however, there were additional requirements voted in by the Board. Meters will be required on wells that pump more than 17.4 gallons per minute and contiguous acres must be reported within this specific Study Area to allow for more information to be collected on ownership and water use.

There were four additional Study Areas proposed and being discussed at this hearing. They are located near Ashtola, Goodnight, Kingsmill, and an addition to the existing area near McLean. Each of these areas was voted into a Study Area by the Board of Directors for additional monitoring.

The public did not comment on the new proposed Study Areas. The majority of people are interested in having accurate data on which to base their water decisions. These Study Areas can help provide sufficient accurate data.

The excellent turn out for the hearing shows that people in this area have become aware of how important water conservation is and understand that water is a finite resource.

C. E. Williams, General Manager of PGCD, said “It is encouraging to see this many people interested in water in the Texas Panhandle.”

TWDB Hearing for Petitioners Challenge of GMA 1 DFCs

Planning for the future use of water is a common but sometimes controversial topic among residents in the Texas Panhandle. Recently a hearing was held at the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission (PRPC) building in Amarillo to help resolve an issue about groundwater.

According to Chapter 35 of the Texas Water Code establishing a Desired Future Condition (DFC) is required by Groundwater Management Areas (GMA) for the aquifers in their region. Recently GMA 1, which consists of 18 counties in the northern Texas Panhandle, set the DFCs for the area. These DFCs were adopted on July 7, 2009, for the Ogallala Aquifer. The four northwest counties have set a DFC of 40 percent left in 50 years, Hemphill County is set to have 80 percent left after 50 years, and the remaining 13 counties have set 50 percent left in 50 years as their goal. The map at right depicts these established DFCs, the counties, and the groundwater districts.

After GMA 1 established these DFCs they were challenged by G & J Ranch Inc. and Mesa Water LP through the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) petition process. The hearing for the process was held at PRPC building in Amarillo on November 11, 2009, to allow TWDB to hear both sides of the issue before coming to a resolution.

A significant crowd gathered to witness the testimonies of the petitioners and GMA 1. An hour and a half was allotted for each side to make their case starting with the petitioners, G & J Ranch Inc. and Mesa Water LP.

Marty Jones, attorney for the petitioners, and Bob Harden, hydrologist, began with an explanation of the information they used and the reasons they believe the current DFCs are unreasonable. In their presentation they expressed concerns that the DFCs being drawn on county boundaries would make it ineffective for aquifer management. They also discussed the DFCs not being fairly distributed across the Panhandle.

Jones and Harden expressed their concern that these DFCs lead to differing assumptions about the water and affects the planning for the water.

The petitioners feel that the DFCs should be equally set across the Panhandle or be divided along the two subdivisions of the Ogallala Aquifer in order to be in compliance with Texas Water Code.

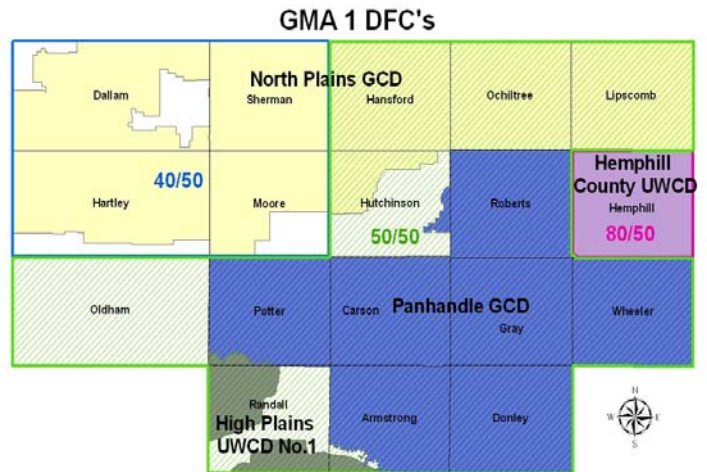
Harden said, "Proper management would be setting the DFCs based on the subdivisions of the aquifer."

GMA 1 responded by having representatives from each of the four groundwater districts explain the effectiveness of the DFC for their respective area.

PGCD's General Manager C. E. Williams began by explaining that the District had set the goal of having 50 percent left in 50 years, over 10 years ago. A significant amount of time and effort has been put into place in order to determine what DFC would best serve the residents of PGCD.

"PGCD is working to preserve our water while creating value for the unproduced water," Williams explained.

High Plains UGWCD stated that their DFC was set for two reasons; to ensure the economic liability of the water and there is already significant support in place by the residents of their District.



North Plains GCD has two DFCs within their District. Steve Walthour, General Manager of NPGCD, explained that there were two different geographic areas within the district that need separate planning. There was also considerable public input for setting their DFCs.

Walthour said "We want water to farm with in the future but we don't want to be out of business before the future arrives."

Hemphill County UGWCD utilized the majority of the time allotted to GMA 1. They used this time to explain the importance of stream flow to their area and have determined the only way to protect this stream flow is to set a goal of 80 percent left in 50 years.

Several people spoke about the need for this goal as a way to provide good stewardship for our water.

"We should strive to leave our resources in better shape than we found them." Jim Haley, Board President of Hemphill County UGWCD, said.

Explanations were given about how water flow works, what the streams mean to the residents of Hemphill County, and the impact these streams have on their eco-tourism industry. The goal has been set so high in that region of the Panhandle because the residents support the goal and its foundations.

The hearing allowed both sides to explain their differing view points on the topic. TWDB petition process held the record open until November 25, 2009, for additional written evidence. The evidence and testimony will be analyzed by TWDB staff, then these recommendations and findings will be reported to the Board on February 17, 2010. TWDB will then make a decision regarding the reasonableness of the current DFCs.

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H2O4Texas The Water Event

In order to show how important water is to our great state, Senator Kip Averitt and Representative Allan Ritter along with several others hosted H2O4Texas The Water Event at the Omni Hotel in Fort Worth, TX on November 16 – 17, 2009.

There were over 600 people in attendance at the water conference. Presentations were made by water leaders from all over the United States to share their knowledge about water use, planning, conservation, infrastructure and current issues. A panel of Texas water leaders was assembled each day to facilitate discussion about what was said and how it can be applied throughout Texas. Several water entities had booths to share their information and ideas about water conservation.

A reception was held to allow the chance for water planning leaders to join together, share their knowledge and discuss how it can be used in their own areas. Everyone in attendance also received a copy of Dr. Robert Glennon's book "Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What To Do About It."

There is a real need to fund projects that are identified on the state and regional water plans. This event showed how important water is and that there is a great deal of interest in taking care of our precious resource.



Left: Representative Ritter making opening remarks on Tuesday November 17 at The Water Event.



Below: Displays set up at H2O4Texas- The Water Event at the Omni Hotel in Fort Worth, TX.