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Western Travis County is in need of a Groundwater Conservation District

Western Travis County is included in a region that has been identified as a Priority Groundwater Management Area and in need of a Groundwater District. Almost the entire Hill Country PGMA has the benefit of a Groundwater District to educate, preserve and protect the limited supply of water in the Trinity and Edwards aquifers. Citizens in Western Travis County have asked Commissioner Daugherty and the TCEQ to create a district or to add this area to an existing GCD.

One reason why:

In early April, neighbors observed that the developer of the new Belvedere subdivision on Hamilton Pool Road had completed the construction of roads through the property, along with an amenity center overlooking an approximately 1-acre lake and large fountain. The lake was full at that time, even though no significant rain had fallen in the area for many months. Neighbors then noticed that this lake continued to be full into the second week of June, in spite of a widespread drought that has been interrupted only by several days of heavy rains in early May. Many local stock tanks and creeks are currently dry or near-dry.

It was then discovered just last week that this lake was being maintained at a constant level by groundwater pumped continuously from a wellhead about 80' from the lake. The pump had apparently been operating around the clock for most of the past couple of months. The lake seeps continuously into Rocky Creek. Due to the ongoing hot weather, there had also been a significant amount of evaporation from the surface of the lake as well as from the spray of the fountain. Neighborhood residents, who depend on their wells and groundwater for basic survival, contacted the developer, Joel Robuck, to express their alarm and concern. Mr. Robuck, to his credit, promptly shut off the pump and has stated that he will await completion of the LCRA waterline before filling up this lake again, using only LCRA water. He acknowledged that he had been pumping the groundwater from the aquifer at the rate of approximately 56,000 gallons per day – an amount that could supply a community of over 300 people! He also stated that in the future he will be harvesting rainwater off the roof of the amenity center and use this as another source for maintaining the lake, thereby avoiding the further use of groundwater.

Area residents also noted that a new well was being drilled further back in the property, just adjacent to a much larger 3-acre lake at the headwaters of Little Barton Creek. This well has not been completed, and we have learned that Mr. Robuck, again in response to the concerns of his neighbors, has stopped work on the drilling, and will not be using a well as a source of water for this larger lake.

The LCRA's contract with Belvedere strictly prohibits the use of ground water on any lot that is less than 10 acres. Since the lakes in question are part of a large greenbelt within Belvedere, Mr. Robuck is probably legally entitled to pump groundwater to fill the lakes in question. In 2004, when the LCRA was touting the benefits of constructing a waterline down Hamilton Pool Road, one of their main selling points to the public was that this waterline would protect the aquifer and groundwater by eliminating the need for intensive pumping and the proliferation of new wells in

the planned subdivisions. Although the immediate problem with Belvedere seems to be checked for the moment, there are no binding guarantees that pumping could not resume in the future.

The community has a number of questions yet to be addressed involving LCRA contracts with developers, and the operation, monitoring, and limits on these types of wells and the potential effects on the aquifer. Had SW Travis County had the protection of a Groundwater Conservation District this situation likely would not have occurred. A well pumping as little as 1500-2000 gallons per day would have been regulated and monitored by a GCD, and millions of gallons of groundwater would have not have been pumped out of the aquifer during a drought solely as a decorative and aesthetic amenity.

Commissioner Daugherty and the Hill Country Alliance recently hosted a community meeting to explore the idea of creating a GCD for this area. Minutes from that meeting are attached. More information about GCD's can be found at www.HillCountryAlliance.org (see "issues").

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