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HCA statement on the DFC petition filed by WVWA

A regional perspective and position about Hill Country groundwater and the DFC

The Texas Hill Country is home to extraordinary water resources, magical hidden springs, crystal-clear swimming holes, peacefully wandering creeks and clear, swiftly flowing rivers. Population is growing and water use is on the rise. Serious drought conditions exist today and experts predict it is unlikely we will recover soon. What we pump from the aquifer has direct consequences for heritage ranch lands, property values of existing landowners and water supply for future generations. It's imperative that we manage water conservatively. [More about Hill Country Groundwater.](#)

Groundwater, water stored in our aquifers, produces springs which feed our creeks and rivers. Regrettably our system of managing water resources in Texas fails to reconcile the fact that surface water and groundwater are essentially the same resource, especially true in the Hill Country.

Groundwater levels in many areas including the Hill Country's Trinity Group Aquifer, is gradually on the decline. HCA is concerned that in some areas we are knowingly "mining" the aquifer; pumping more water out than is being replenished. Over pumping the aquifer slows spring flow and stream flow, ultimately drying our rivers as well.

The State of Texas is implementing a regional system for the management of groundwater supplies using local control, public input and the best available science. The idea is to set management goals known as Desired Future Conditions (DFCs) so that groundwater districts in a shared aquifer begin to manage the aquifer jointly.

A Desired Future Condition (DFC) for the Trinity Group Aquifer was approved on July 26, 2010 at a meeting of the Hill Country's Groundwater Management Area 9 (GMA-9). The result of this approval allows for pumping to increase an additional aquifer drawdown averaging 30 feet through 2060.

Public comments recorded over the past five years during several public meetings throughout GMA-9 indicate strong public preference for a DFC requiring zero additional long-term drawdown. Citizens routinely expressed concern about protecting land values, access to groundwater through existing wells, and maintaining spring flows and groundwater discharge to creeks and rivers. Many argue that the approved DFC doesn't adequately reflect public consensus. The DFC was voted on by elected representatives from Groundwater Conservation Districts located in GMA.

While the DFC process is clearly a step in the right direction, there is a need for continual review and refinement of the system and evaluation of science, local conditions, gaps and public opinion. One specific flaw that needs attention is that a high percentage of wells are exempt so it can be difficult to reliably account for these withdrawals. Additionally the DFC process needs improvement to more adequately take into account the limitations of groundwater modeling and to more appropriately address aquifer depletion issues and local impacts to individual well owners, spring flows and land values.

Implementation and management goals may vary among different districts based on specific issues and local conditions where spring flow subsides, wells perform poorly, or extremely high demand exists. It may be

necessary for an individual district to seek a DFC different from that of surrounding districts, subject to other districts voting their approval based on scientific data.

The Wimberley Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) has filed a petition challenging the reasonableness of the “30-foot” DFC. Two critical concerns are cited:

- 1) Allowing 30 feet of additional average drawdown in the Trinity Group Aquifer in Hays County authorizes pumping increases from permitted wells, which—when coupled with likely pumping increases from wells exempt from operating permits—will cause serious or irreversible impairment of water wells serving over 6,000 existing homes and an unknown number of future homes in Hays County.
- 2) The allowable 30 feet of additional average drawdown—which means even deeper groundwater decline in areas of heaviest pumping—will diminish or eliminate spring flows in Wimberley Valley and western Hays County, watersheds that have historically helped to sustain discharge to Jacob’s Well, Blue Hole, Cypress Creek, the Blanco River, and other watercourses.

A copy of the WVWA DFC Petition is available at www.wimberleywatershed.org

The Hill Country Alliance fully supports the DFC appeal petition submitted to the region’s groundwater conservation districts and Texas Water Development Board. HCA supports continued refinement of the DFC process such that groundwater may be managed locally and sustainably. Empowered Groundwater Conservation Districts working together are essential to maintaining adequate supplies of groundwater and eternally flowing springs, features that characterize the heart and soul of the Hill Country.

HCA is a nonprofit organization raising public awareness and building community support around the need to protect the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. To learn more about Hill Country Alliance initiatives, visit its website (www.hillcountryalliance.org).