



Issue: Groundwater Conservation Districts Myths and Truths

Photo by W. Price



HCA is a passionate community caring for the unique features, spring-fed streams, heritage ranch lands, spectacular beauty and vibrant culture of the Texas Hill Country for the benefit of future generations.

Groundwater is precious. In many areas of the Hill Country we are already pumping more than nature provides. Groundwater Conservation Districts (GCD's) are the only resource for managing dwindling groundwater resources in Texas. Many communities and landowners welcome and fully support GCD's. In other areas, confusion and misinformation has led to challenges creating and supporting districts. These Myths and Truths are intended to help sort out the facts and encourage the public to get involved in local groundwater management. Sustaining groundwater supply is the responsible thing to do for future generations.

Myth #1 A Groundwater Conservation District will meter and monitor my well.

TRUTH Individual household wells in a GCD generally do not require permits, meters, and use monitoring / reporting. By statute, wells used solely for domestic or livestock purposes on tracts that are more than 10 acres and that are capable of producing no more than 10,000 to 25,000 gallons of water per day (depending on enabling statute) are exempt from permitting and metering/use-reporting. Individual GCDs can make exempt use definition less restrictive but are prohibited from making it more restrictive than their enabling legislation allows. The wells that are required to have permits are those larger water-supply wells used for various purposes, including public water supply, that have the potential to affect the groundwater levels and quality over wider areas than individual household wells.

Myth #2 A new GCD means high taxes.

TRUTH While no official estimate of a tax rate has been established, the annual tax rate per \$100,000 property valuation for the GCD in this area has been estimated at approximately \$2.00 – two dollars a year, the cost of about a six pack of soft drinks! No one likes taxes, especially if the attendant benefits are far removed from the tax base. But in this area, ad valorem taxation is the more equitable and appropriate way to protect the groundwater resources that are present and threatened throughout the area. The alternative - a water use fee-based GCD - would be very inefficient since in this area there are many more exempt wells that require protection than those that would have a permit and accompanying water use fee.



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Groundwater Conservation Districts in the Hill Country

Bandera County River Authority
and Groundwater District
www.bcragd.org

Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer
Conservation District
www.bseacd.org

Blanco-Pedernales Groundwater
Conservation District
www.blancocountygroundwater.org

Central Texas Groundwater
Conservation District (Burnet County)
www.centraltexasgcd.org

Cow Creek Groundwater
Conservation District (Kendall County)
www.ccgcd.org

Edwards Aquifer Authority
www.edwardsaquifer.org

Hays Trinity Groundwater
Conservation District
www.haysgroundwater.com

Headwaters Groundwater
Conservation District (Kerr County)
www.hgcd.org

Hickory Underground Water
Conservation District (Mason County)
www.hickoryuwcd.org

Hill Country Underground Water
Conservation District (Gillespie County)
www.hcuwcd.org

Medina County Groundwater
Conservation District
www.medinagwcd.org

Real Edwards Conservation
and Reclamation District
www.recrd.org

Trinity Glen Rose Groundwater
Conservation District (Bexar County)
www.trinityglenrose.org

Uvalde County Underground Water
Conservation District
www.uvaldecountyuwcd.org

Myth #3 My neighborhood is not on well water, we use surface water (water piped from a lake or river) so I don't need to worry about the aquifer and I shouldn't be concerned about groundwater management.

TRUTH: A healthy and sustainable aquifer is essential for life. Aquifers feed springs and creeks that become our rivers and lakes. All water resources, rivers, lakes, creeks, springs provide quality of life for residents, tourism and recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat and irreplaceable natural beauty. Property values will decline if groundwater becomes unreliable in our community. In this sense, it is analogous to supporting local public educational systems; because they are for the good of the community, school taxes are paid by everyone, even those that do not have children in school.

Myth #4 There is no way to participate in local GCD decisions.

TRUTH Each GCD in Texas (there are 99 at the time of this writing) is governed by a locally elected board of directors. Not only can you become involved in a GCD, you can strive to serve on a GCD board! GCD meetings must have proper notice, be open to the public and offer time for public input and comments.

One activity each GCD participates in is the creation of a regional "Desired Future Condition," often referred to as a "DFC." This is an agreed upon quantifiable future groundwater condition. These conditions, called metrics, can be a particular groundwater level, a level of water quality, a volume of spring flows or other condition. The chosen conditions serve as management goals and define how an aquifer will look in the future. This is one of the most important functions of the GCD and one of the most important opportunities for public involvement. Get to know your local GCD staff and board, they are public servants and they have a responsibility to listen to their constituents. HCA's "DFC" for the Hill Country is conservative groundwater management that maintains healthy spring flow throughout the region.

Myth #5 We don't know enough about the aquifer at this time to conclude the need for a GCD.

TRUTH The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has determined on the basis of ample knowledge about the aquifers in this area that its groundwater resources are or will soon be impaired, and that a GCD is required to manage the resources in this area. It is well documented that area wells have been going dry during times of drought. And, creating a GCD is the only way we will begin to gather data and evaluate the aquifer in order to make smart decisions about managing the resource for future generations. The problem needs to be addressed now, before it is too late to resolve problems without severe disruption in water supplies.

Myth #6 A GCD is a new concept to control growth.

TRUTH GCDs were created by the Texas Legislature back in 1949 and have been declared by the Legislature as the State's preferred means to manage groundwater throughout the state. GCDs are not empowered to "control growth," just protect, preserve, and conserve groundwater through equitable and local management. Landowners and communities around the state have petitioned for and welcomed GCDs and have funded GCDs with ad valorem taxes for decades, to protect their and their neighbors' private property interests in groundwater. There are currently 99 GCDs in place statewide evaluating groundwater resources and creating groundwater management plans. To be effective, GCD's need to consider aquifer boundaries rather than county lines and they must be adequately funded.

A Final TRUTH: "Groundwater is and will continue to be a major source of water for Texans. However, in many parts of the state, more groundwater is being used than is being replenished through natural means. If this practice continues, Texas water costs will rise, land could subside, water quality could decline and people in some areas could run out of water." ~Questions about Groundwater Conservation Districts in Texas, Texas Cooperative Extension at Texas A&M University

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For information and resources
on Texas groundwater visit:
[www.hillcountryalliance.org/
HCA/Groundwater](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/HCA/Groundwater)



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