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Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission
Approves Groundwater Management Plan

April 10, 2014

The Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission (CAGWCC) is putting the latest and best science available to work in launching an updated strategy in its continuing mission to combat saltwater encroachment and protect the productive use and sustainability of groundwater in the Baton Rouge area – laying out a defined plan of action in setting a schedule for the next 10 years to address the areas of greatest concern in the aquifer sands of highest priority. While the CAGWCC’s overall goal of protecting productive use and sustainability of the aquifer system have not changed, the new plan further refines the ongoing strategy of the CAGWCC in seeking the best methods to efficiently manage groundwater supplies in the region.

The 10-year management plan approved this week outlines the process that will be used by the CAGWCC for evaluating sound and objective science in formulating specific management actions for each aquifer, or “sand,” in Baton Rouge. The group’s efforts will be based on the extensive modeling of the entire system by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), work that the city-parish government, state Department of Transportation and Development, and CAGWCC itself have committed jointly to underwrite. The USGS models for the different primary sands of the aquifer system are expected to be rolled out once a year through 2021 – with modeling of the key “1,500-foot” and “2,000-foot” sands already complete.

The CAGWCC has already taken initial action on the sands already modeled, imposing significant reductions and limitations in local groundwater withdrawals, while continuing to pursue aggressive scientific modeling to understand the workings of the Southern Hills aquifer system close to the Baton Rouge fault, where saltwater encroachment from the south is occurring. CAGWCC also has incorporated into its plan the efforts of the Baton Rouge Water Company in installing a “scavenger well” to determine the effectiveness of that method in intercepting saltwater moving northward from the Baton Rouge fault.

CAGWCC Chairman Dennis McGehee applauded the work of his ad-hoc group, including several former members of the Commission, in converting the CAGWCC's vision into a plan for action in both the short and longer term.

"They are a dedicated set of guys and recognized the need for us to be clear and coherent in our message and plan of action," he said. "This plan gives us clear goals and timetables for evaluating the scientific data and for crafting the appropriate response. Just as important, it gives the public a transparent view into our process."

The USGS models are critical to the entire process. Only when the hydraulics of groundwater in a "sand," and potential for saltwater encroachment are modeled with proven scientific methods is the CAGWCC then able to evaluate the potential effectiveness and impacts of different management options, including pumping reductions, freshwater injection, saltwater removal south of the Baton Rouge fault, saltwater scavenging, or various combinations of these and other actions.

The CAGWCC was created by the Legislature in 1974 and has broad powers to regulate and manage the use of groundwater in a five-parish region, including East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, East Feliciana, and West Feliciana Parishes. East Baton Rouge in particular utilizes the abundant Southern Hills Aquifer system for both public supply and industrial use, about 150 million gallons a day.

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