

Vote! May 5: Southwestern Travis County Groundwater Conservation District

The Trinity Aquifer is the sole source of water for tens of thousands of domestic and ranching wells across the Hill Country including thousands of households in western Travis County. Current and projected population increases exceed the carrying capacity of the aquifer in some locations, resulting in decreased spring-flow and failing domestic water wells.

“Protecting our water supplies is a bi-partisan issue that affects us all.”

State Representative Paul Workman (District 47)

Key Facts about the Southwestern Travis County GCD

The District’s legislation protects private property rights:

- NO financial or regulatory impact to citizens of Lakeway, Hills of Lakeway, Bee Cave, or West Lake Hills, who are customers of surface-water based utilities
- NO groundwater production fees or metering on the large majority of private domestic wells¹ or livestock and poultry wells²
- NO ad-valorem property taxation
- NO powers of eminent domain
- The District was not designed to adversely impact future development.

The District will benefit local well owners by:

- Protecting well water from contamination from septic systems by enforcing well setback requirements
- Protecting well water quality by ensuring that wells are drilled and cased in a professional manner in accordance with state law and local hydrogeologic conditions
- Providing property owners with information about the most prolific layer of the aquifer
- Providing property owners information about water quality and groundwater yields in their well
- Requiring permits for large groundwater users that assure no negative impacts from major groundwater withdrawals on other wells in the area
- Gathering data on aquifer contribution to stream-flow and lake levels
- Local responsibility and control of the aquifer’s future viability
- Local representation at the Hill Country Trinity Aquifer-wide planning group

Why is a GCD needed?

Population growth and a limited supply of groundwater has put the Trinity Aquifer in danger of being over-pumped which can result in decreased river and stream flow, limited spring-flow, and declining aquifer tables. Over-pumping can dry up domestic wells and reduce stream and pond levels, endangering property values, and hurting the local economy, thereby harming Hill Country amenities.

What is the Southwestern Travis County GCD?

The Southwestern Travis County Groundwater Conservation District now pending confirmation by voters is a locally requested and created District with locally elected Directors whose purpose is to manage and

¹ Exempt domestic wells are defined as those that can produce at a rate of no more than 10,000 gallons per day (the average Travis County private well household of 4 uses less than 1,000 gallons per day).

² Exempt livestock and poultry wells are defined as those that can produce no more than 25,000 gallons per day and are on properties larger than 10 acres.

protect the water of the Trinity Aquifer beneath western Travis County from overdraft and to prevent well contamination and groundwater waste.

- The District is designed to act as a groundwater management and data gathering entity that has the ability to regulate certain commercial and non-beneficial (wasteful) groundwater uses.
- Enabling legislation (House Bill 4345) became law in 2017, after being initiated by Representative Paul Workman and supported by Senator Dawn Buckingham—with bipartisan support of legislators and locally elected officials.
- The District was created in order to ensure that a locally-responsive governmental entity manage the area's groundwater.
- Groundwater Conservation Districts (GCDs) are the legislature's preferred method for managing aquifers -- the new Travis County District will be the 100th GCD in the state.

How will the GCD work?

The new GCD will be governed by a seven-member locally elected Board of Directors and will be staffed according to the requirements of the enabling legislation and the GCD Board's groundwater management rules. The primary purpose of the GCD will be to create a permitting process and monitoring system for commercial and large-scale water extraction operations in order to manage and protect the groundwater resource.

- A temporary Board of Directors has been appointed by locally elected officials that will steward the GCD until the confirmation election.
- Residents of the Cities of Lakeway/Hills of Lakeway, Bee Cave, and portions of West Lake Hills will each elect one Director.
- County residents in unincorporated areas will elect four at-large Directors who beneficially use groundwater from the GCD.
- The District will be funded primarily by groundwater user fees, including larger-well production fees and service connection fees by water utilities using groundwater.
- There will be NO NEW TAXES as a result of the District. The District is statutorily prohibited from using ad-valorem taxation to fund its work.

Where will this GCD operate?

Southwestern Travis County Groundwater Conservation District boundaries are Lakes Austin and Travis on the north, the Travis County line on the west and south, and the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District's western boundary (a line that includes Westlake Dr. down to the western border of Circle C Ranch) on the east.

Who will be impacted by this GCD?

Citizens of Lakeway/Hills of Lakeway, Bee Cave, and West Lake are on surface water and will not be affected or financially impacted by the new district. The Board of Directors is prohibited from assessing taxes, and district permitting and metering requirements will not apply to exempt well owners though they may be assessed modest administrative fees. The regulated community will be a small set of non-exempt users who pump much larger amounts of groundwater from the Trinity Aquifer, including irrigated golf courses; commercial and industrial users; and MUDs, WCIDs, and public water suppliers on groundwater.

For more information: <https://www.traviscountytexas.gov/gcd>
and <http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/swtgcd>

Visit the Hill Country Alliance at:
www.hillcountryalliance.org

