



**Barton Springs
Edwards Aquifer**
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

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Extreme Drought Prompts Aquifer District to Reduce Amount of Allowable Groundwater Pumping

July 28, 2009 – The Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District is proposing to create a new, extreme stage of drought that would require a 40% cutback in groundwater pumping for all permitted users.

The proposal is one of a package of rule changes designed to respond more effectively to extreme and prolonged droughts, and to manage more equitably groundwater resources.

“This is a scarce resource, and everyone has a shared interest in making sure each gallon of water is used fairly and responsibly,” said Kirk Holland, General Manager of the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District. “These proposals are preparing for the previously unthinkable situation where our existing rules would be insufficient to protect people and the aquifer.”

“We will never get a second chance to save water that isn’t conserved in this drought.”

The proposed rules would:

- Create a new extreme drought stage, designated an Exceptional Drought, that is more severe than the current Critical Stage and in which groundwater usage is limited to that essential for public health and welfare;
- Specify additional curtailments in groundwater pumping and uses if aquifer water levels fall below Exceptional Stage levels to a newly defined Emergency Response Period;
- Differentiate between the Edwards Aquifer and other aquifers in drought management and other regulations to encourage diversification of water supplies; and

- Create a temporary transfer permit program that allows historic-use permit holders with available alternate supplies to transfer groundwater withdrawal rights to those with insufficient supplies during extreme drought.

These rule changes are timely because the aquifers in the District are already strained in the current severe drought and are expected to suffer further - from higher than usual water demands during the dry, hot summer, and from a continuation of the La Nina climatic conditions, which suggest no replenishment is likely until well into the fall months. The District has had a moratorium on new Edwards Aquifer groundwater withdrawals since April 9, 2009, and that moratorium would continue under the new rules.

Holland noted further that “the District’s permittees and their end-user customers have largely complied so far with the District’s current mandatory 30% reductions under Critical Stage drought, but that the additional curtailments required under the proposed rules will be difficult for all those who use the aquifer, will cause some hard decisions to be made about personal priorities concerning water use, and could require acquiring alternative water sources for either substitute or supplemental supplies at greatly increased cost, if available at all.”

The District’s board of directors initiated a formal rule-change process on July 23, triggering a statutory 20-day notice period. A public hearing on the proposed rule changes will be held on Aug. 27. The proposed changes in both tabular summary and markup forms will be available for viewing on the District website at www.bseacd.org/rules or will be available for inspection and copying at the District’s office 20 days prior to commencement of the public hearing. Written comments will also be accepted at least until the public hearing is held. For more information, please contact the District office at (512) 282-8441.

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