

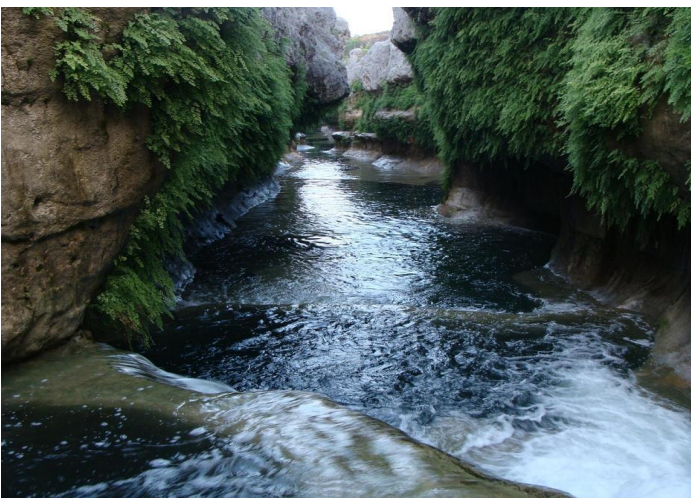


Issues and Actions: Groundwater Conservation Districts – Myths and Truths

Unfortunately there are several myths floating around that make people nervous about being included in a Groundwater Conservation District (GCD).

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.



Hill Country Alliance is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country.

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.

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 Busters (continued)

Myth #4 - 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 #5 - The TCEQ is trying to create and control this tri-county GCD.

TRUTH: The TCEQ is recommending the creation of a new district to respond to existing threats to aquifer quantity and quality in the area. Unless the Legislature acts to establish statutorily a new district before the TCEQ order creating the new district, in which event the district must be approved in a confirmation election by the voters in the area, the TCEQ may order the new district created without such confirmation elections, and then hold tax ratification and director elections. Regardless of which of these methods of formation is used, the new district will ultimately be governed by a board of locally elected directors, operating under the statutory authorities for all GCDs in the state and accountable to the local voters in the single member precincts. A GCD provides the area with a more effective voice in the recurring regional groundwater planning for desired future conditions of aquifers in the area, rather than having those conditions decided solely by people who do not live in and are not accountable to constituents in this area.

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 96 GCDs in place statewide evaluating groundwater resources and creating groundwater management plans.

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”.



Quote from a publication titled: Questions about Groundwater Conservation Districts in Texas, written by the Texas Cooperative Extension at Texas A&M University