

APPENDIX 4

Water Issues Continue in Lost Pines District

Vista Ridge still affecting local wells

In January, the Giddings Times & News reported on a variety of groundwater well failures being experienced by landowners in northeastern Lee County.

The problems are widely believed to be related to the onset of pumping of 50,000 acre-feet per year (AFY), or roughly 16 billion gallons per year, for the City of San Antonio by the Vista Ridge project in Burleson County, very near the Lee County line.

Groundwater from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer supplies the water needs of our part of central Texas, including Lee, Bastrop, Burleson, Milam, Brazos, and Robertson counties. Three groundwater districts manage the groundwater resources in those counties, including our local Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District.

The Post Oak Savannah Groundwater Conservation District, which oversees groundwater in Burleson and Milam counties, issued what is now the Vista Ridge permit in 2004. Pumping from eighteen wells in Burleson County began in April 2020 and ramped up to full production last summer.

Vista Ridge is allowed to pump up to 15,000 AFY from the Carrizo formation, and up to 40,835 AFY from the Simsboro formation of the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer. The "Wilcox Group" lies below the Carrizo and is composed of the Calvert Bluff, Simsboro and Hooper formations.

It is widely believed that the nine Vista Ridge wells in the Carrizo started impacting Burleson and Lee County wells very soon after pumping started. The affected wells in Lee County are believed to be drawing water from the Carrizo.

Lost Pines asked to help

At the January 21 meeting of the Lost Pines Board, Andrew Wier and Michele Gangnes, directors of the Simsboro Aquifer Water Defense Fund (SAWDF), appealed to the Board in public comment to get involved in these issues as part of the District's mission to protect the water supply in Lee and Bastrop counties.

Wier told the Board that at that time, SAWDF had received reports that fifteen residents in the northeastern part of the county have spent \$1,000, with some spending two or three times that amount, to lower the pumps in their wells.

He went on to say those well owners have experienced anywhere from 50' to 100' of drawdown in their wells.

SAWDF advocates for landowners

When asked for an update on the well failures, Gangnes said additional reports have been received, with at least one owner reporting he had to spend \$10,000 to lower his pump to reach water and buy a more powerful pump to lift water from the much lower depth.

Gangnes went on to say that SAWDF is engaged in ongoing outreach to well owners in north Lee County. SAWDF also plans to engage with Groundwater Management Area 12, which consists of five groundwater districts, including Lost Pines, Post Oak and Brazos Valley GCDs.

Those districts work collaboratively to set each district's and each aquifer formation's "Desired Future Conditions" for the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer and other minor aquifers over a 60-year period. The DFC are re-set every 5 years, with new DFC .expected to be set in 2021.

The Desired Future Conditions that are set by each district in GMA 12 are expressed as how much average drawdown across each county can be tolerated over each 60-year period. Information on GMA-12 and the current DFC planning cycle can be found by searching for "Groundwater Management Areas" at www.twdb.org.

The next Zoom meeting of GMA-12 is set for February 12, 2021 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The public is invited to attend by internet or telephone. The agenda is posted on SAWDF's website at www.simsborowaterdefensefund.org.

"Our GMA, and ultimately the Texas Water Development Board and our legislators, need to have specific information about what is going on here, so they can be part of the solution. No landowner I know signed on to have this kind of expense land on them out of nowhere, and they need to know what the future will bring. This issue won't go away tomorrow," Gangnes said.

Wells also failing in Burleson County

She went on to say reports coming out of the Post Oak District indicate that, since August 2020, as many as twenty-six Carrizo wells had to have pumps lowered or wells completely redrilled, with another ten showing signs of needing service in the near future.

Burleson and Milam county well owners who have enrolled in Post Oak's Well Assistance Program are eligible for well mitigation assistance. Details of the program are found at www.posgcd.org in the News section.

The Lost Pines District has no mitigation funding or assistance for landowners, but recently appointed a committee of board members to be assisted by District staff and consultants to study the well issues.

Well owners encouraged to register wells

Gangnes went on to say Lee County landowners who have called the District about their well failures have been told there's nothing the Lost Pines District can do about a permit or pumping in another groundwater district.

She encouraged well owners who are not sure if their wells are registered with Lost Pines to call the District. "They need to know about your well in order for them to care about your well, it's as simple as that," Gangnes said.

She said that, while the District may not have direct authority over Post Oak wells, they need to know we expect them to have a plan for what will happen to local wells if pumping ever starts by the two mega-projects permitted by Lost Pines in the Simsboro.

Gangnes ended her comments to the District's Board on January 21 by saying the Board could be certain that their constituent landowners will identify the Lost Pines district and neighboring groundwater districts with "whatever good and whatever bad happens to their property rights and their lifeblood water".

LCRA permit update

Last week, we reported on developments concerning the Lower Colorado River Authority's bid to pump groundwater in Bastrop County for export to Travis County, now pending before the Lost Pines Board.

The permit LCRA seeks would add pumping of another 25,000 AFY in the Simsboro to the combined 74,500 AFY of Simsboro water that Gatehouse Water and Recharge Water are currently permitted by Lost Pines to pump.

The LCRA permit hearing was continued from January 28 to give the Board members more time to review the legal arguments presented on that date.

No date has been set for a continuation of the hearing. Interested persons may contact the District at 512-360-5088 or at lpgcd@lostpineswater.org to sign up for notices of meetings and agendas.

The video recording of the first phase of the LCRA permit hearing on January 28, 2020 is available for download at <https://www.lostpineswater.org/agendacenter/groundwater-conservation-district-board-of-directors-2/?#01282021-200>.

SAWDF may be contacted at info@simsborowaterdefensefund.org or at P.O. Box 931, Elgin, Texas 78621.