

# West Texas Regional Groundwater Alliance

COKE / CROCKETT / GLASSCOCK / HICKORY / HILL COUNTRY / IRION / KIMBLE / LIPAN-KICKAPOO / LONE WOLF / MENARD / MIDDLE PECOS / PERMIAN BASIN / PLATEAU / REEVES / SANTA RITA / STERLING / SUTTON / WES-TEX

September 25, 2020

To: Chairman Larson and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

In response to the Formal Request for Information issued August 1, 2020, the West Texas Regional Groundwater Alliance respectfully submits for your consideration this letter addressing **Interim Charge #3**, which charges the Committee with monitoring the joint planning process for groundwater and the achievement of the desired conditions for aquifers by groundwater conservation districts. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and share our perspective on managing the state's most valuable resource.

The West Texas Regional Groundwater Alliance (WTRGA) originated in May of 1988 as a simple cooperative agreement to facilitate better resource allocation between four small groundwater conservation districts (GCDs). Over time as new GCDs were created in western Texas, more districts recognized the value of collaborating with neighboring districts. In 1996 the original agreement was redrafted and the WTRGA was established. The WTRGA now consists of 18 GCDs sharing a common objective: to facilitate the conservation, preservation, and beneficial use of water resources while optimizing the public's tax dollars to utilize the best available science in management. WTRGA members represent a diverse slice of West Texas covering four state senate districts, eight state house districts, three groundwater management areas (GMAs), and three regional water planning groups (RWPGs).

First, a brief commentary on the planning process and development of the desired future conditions, generally. Through the efforts of joint planning in the Groundwater Management Areas, an individual GCD's management plan is updated every five years to ensure its goals and objectives are consistent with achieving the regionally adopted desired future conditions (DFC). A majority of GCDs utilize a monitor well network to both further the best available science of local aquifer conditions and to monitor local efforts to achieve the DFC. Data from well monitoring is utilized in a variety of ways across many levels of government, from internal GCD analysis to determine drought stage reductions, area-wide publication for public education and awareness, regional estimation of achievement of the DFC, yearly submission to the TWDB Water Level Program, and so much more. Locally created and maintained well monitor networks and the data such networks generate fuel the joint planning groundwater model inputs both in model creation and update as well as model application of DFC establishment. This data-driven product of joint planning facilitates the regional planning process's work in developing a state plan for managing water supplies with the goal of meeting all of Texas's water supply needs for the next 50 years. Local GCDs drive these vital state processes and "bottom up" planning through judicious expenditures of local public dollars.

The west Texas GCD's that constitute the WTRGA vary across metrics. This Alliance includes districts established in 1981 and as recently as 2013, with annual budgets spanning from less than \$50,000 to \$850,000. Populations among members districts range from 1,200 to over 100,000 people, and registered wells per district number anywhere from 700 to over 13,000. Despite these differences, WTRGA districts are united by a commitment to stewardship, guided by the best science available, of both water resources and the tax dollars entrusted to them.

Prior to joining the WTRGA, an interested GCD must commit to maintaining a well monitoring network and adopt and adhere to a management plan, as defined in Sec. 36.1071. The WTRGA regularly collaborates amongst member districts on monitoring equipment, analysis methodologies, trouble shooting, equipment sharing, and bulk ordering resulting in the optimal use of every public dollar. Recently, districts in WTRGA's southern region collectively hired a consultant to complete an important study that would have been individually cost-prohibitive. We order rain gauges as a group in order to qualify for a more favorable discounted rate. We even carpool to meetings when possible in order to stretch every budget dollar as far as possible.

In addition to the important information sharing and group learning that occurs through the GMAs and RWPGs, participation in the WTRGA creates additional opportunities for cross-pollination of best practices and data between districts, particularly among districts belonging to different GMAs or planning groups.

We provide these examples to demonstrate the initiative of GCDs in meeting - and exceeding – their legal obligations “to protect property rights, balance the conservation and development of groundwater to meet the needs of this state, and use the best available science in the conservation and development of groundwater.” We appreciate the Legislatures confidence in GCDs’ abilities to carry out their responsibilities without overly prescriptive statewide mandates, and instead base their management decisions on varying local inputs, the best available science, and the ability to voluntarily organize and pool resources when necessary.

The member groundwater conservation districts of the WTRGA again appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the role of GCDs in the joint planning process for groundwater and highlight our efforts in achieving the desired future conditions. We hope this information will be useful to the Committee in carrying out its charge and we look forward to serving as a resource in future policy discussions on issues impacting groundwater management and conservation.

Respectfully,

Winton Milliff, *Coke County UWCD*  
Slate Williams, *Crockett County GCD*  
Rhetta Yanez, *Glasscock GCD*  
David Huie, *Hickory UWCD No 1*  
Paul Tybor, *Hill Country UWCD*  
Scott Holland, *Irion County WCD*  
Jerry Kirby, *Kimble County GCD*  
Leon Braden, *Lipan-Kickapoo WCD*  
Sue Young, *Lone Wolf GCD*

Tami Russell, *Menard County UWD*  
Ty Edwards, *Middle Pecos GCD*  
Donna Springer, *Permian Basin UWCD*  
Jon Cartwright, *Plateau UWC & SD*  
Greg Perrin, *Reeves County GCD*  
Regina Gomez, *Santa Rita UWCD*  
Diana Thomas, *Sterling County UWCD*  
Meredith Allen, *Sutton County UWCD*  
Dale Adams, *Wes-Tex GCD*