North Plains Water News

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North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Passes New Rules

In their April board meeting the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Board of Directors voted 6-1 to repeal the existing rules and approve newly proposed and revised rules for the district. The decision is the culmination of three years of review by the board. Members of the public voiced their opinions about the new rules in a public hearing immediately preceding the board meeting. The district also held three stakeholder meetings in March to discuss the proposed new rules.

According to General Manager, Steve Walthour, the new rules will streamline the compliance process, as well as make necessary updates for achieving the district's desired future conditions.

The proposed rules reorganization began in June 2012, when the board reviewed the concept of reorganizing the rules to make the document easier for the public to understand and for the district staff to implement. The board set out to repeal rules that are no longer needed, to logically consolidate and reorder the rules, and to adopt new rules that would clarify how to comply with the district's regulations.

One of the general changes to the rules includes replacing the term "Property" used to identify the area of groundwater production, with "Groundwater Production Unit". This change is intended to make it clear that the Groundwater Production Unit, or GPU, pertains only to groundwater and not the surface of the property. Since the district's only jurisdiction is the management of groundwater, changing the term to "Groundwater Production Unit," is intended to be more descriptive.

The new rules also repeal the unused well classification. This classification was developed ten years ago to allow those well owners that had wells that were no longer active to be exempted from groundwater production reporting. The rule had some unforeseen consequences including: causing the district to lose the ability to track these wells as they changed ownership, and allowing new owners to place the wells back into service without notifying the district. Also, the new owners were often not even aware that the wells existed. Requiring all owners of wells, other than wells used for domestic or livestock purposes, to annually report their groundwater withdrawals will allow the district to maintain better well ownership records and educate new owners regarding the district's conservation rules. In addition to rule changes already mentioned, the remaining rule changes are detailed below under the appropriate chapters and headings.

One of the new NPGCD rules allows an electronic copy of a permit or registration as an alternative to the hard copy that was previously required on-site during the drilling or equipping of a well.

Chapter 1 "General Provisions and District Jurisdiction" provides general information for doing business with the district and complying with district rules.

Chapter 2 "Applications, Permits, Registrations" amends rules to allow an electronic copy as an alternative to the hard copy of a permit or registration that is required during the drilling or equipping of a well. Rule amendments also allow an owner of the well to begin operation of the well once the

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Meter Cost-Share Program Continues to Grow

The district now has more money to help offset the cost of meters on irrigation wells. District staff was notified in May that the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) has awarded the district an additional $800,000 to be passed on to producers who install new meters on their irrigation wells. That brings the total to $1.4 million the TWDB is providing to fund the district's metering program. The funds are awarded to the district by the TWDB on the basis that meters are an accepted and effective management tool for producers and for groundwater conservation districts.

In October 2014, the TWDB awarded the district a grant of $600,000 for the first round of funding for the metering program. Since that time the district has registered 149 properties into the Meter Reimbursement Program which represent approximately 500 meters to be purchased. The initial grant amount was based on cost sharing approximately 1000 meters, so about half of the first round of funding is still available to help purchase new meters.

The $800,000 from the latest grant award will be available to continue to cost share the purchase of irrigation well meters after the first round of funding is expended. The TWDB funds will allow the district to assist in the purchase of approximately 2300 meters across the district.

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Final Year of the 200-12 Project Builds on Past, Sets Stage for Future

In the final year of the "200-12 Reduced Irrigation on Corn Demonstration Project," the 2014 growing season once again showed the daunting goal of producing 200 bushels of corn on a mere 12-inches of irrigation water is well within reach. The "200-12" project is based on 8 inches of seasonal rainfall combined with 6 inches of pre-season stored soil moisture, and the 12-inches of irrigation, to reach a total water use of 26 inches for the crop.

In 2014, with an irrigation capacity of 3 gpm per acre, Harold Grall's Moore County "200-12" field yielded 201 bushels per acre on 12.96 inches of irrigation. While the irrigation was almost an inch over the goal, the field received 9.19 inches of rain for a total of 22.15 inches of irrigation and rainfall. This field started the season with almost no stored soil moisture, so ultimately the field produced an extra bushel of yield above the goal with almost 3.85 inches less total water than the model. Soil water monitoring shows the profile was 0.68 inches wetter at harvest than at planting. The field produced 15.51 bushels per inch of irrigation water compared to normal grower average of 9 bushels when using traditional

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New Center, Familiar Face

Knowledge is arguably one of the most valuable things a person can possess. Here at the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District, Curtis Schwertner is just one of the extremely knowledgeable people eager to help both residents and farmers living and working within the district to achieve their goals.

A native of the Texas Panhandle, Schwertner graduated from Stratford High School and went on to earn a bachelors of science degree from Oklahoma Panhandle State University. Though Schwertner began working for the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District in September 2014, his connection to the district has spanned a much greater length of time. As an Ag Research Technician for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Schwertner spent a great deal of his 33-year career on what is now known as the North Plains Water Conservation Center at Etter.

"My hope is that our water conservation center can be a place where producers and the public in this area can view demonstrations of relevant practices for the conservation of water resources," Schwertner said. "As far as my hopes for the district, I want to be part of continuing to be proactive in our efforts to conserve water resources in our area."

As a Natural Resources Specialist for the district, Schwertner will be busy assisting in the operation of the new Water Conservation Center. In addition to working with district conservationist, Leon New and farmer Stan Spain at the Center, Schwertner will maintain the appearance of the grounds, assist the Conservation Outreach division, and manage a host of other tasks that are sure to pop up on such an integral educational resource for the district.

"I enjoy working for the district because it's a new challenge for me. I also enjoy helping to build this new project for the district," Schwertner said. "This position is rewarding because the district has a vision for what the Water Conservation Center can become in the future."

According to Schwertner, the sense of purpose and personal growth he experiences at the district are things he didn't feel in previous positions.

"The district's work is vitally important because our water resources are finite; we cannot afford to waste them," Schwertner said. "We need to get the maximum value from the water we have and we need to find ways to sustain water use in the future."

Not only does Schwertner enjoy working with his colleagues at the district, but also the producers and community members who make up the board of directors.

"The district's board of directors is comprised of producers who are proactive and forward thinking," Schwertner said. "They strive to promote common sense water-use practices in our communities."

Schwertner and his wife, Dorothy, have two daughters, Hannah and Emily. The family is active in their parish, Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, in Dumas.

District Passes New Rules

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meter serial number is provided, rather than requiring the general manager to inspect the well prior to operation. The rules require owners of wells used for oil and gas rig supply to report the groundwater produced; and allows the board to review the final location of a well once it is drilled, instead of waiting until all equipment is installed on the well. Additionally, the four pages of rules related to export permits have been amended to one rule that simply references the specific Texas Water Code regulation.

Chapter 3 "Well Classification, Spacing and Density" creates a new small well classification for wells used for business that are smaller than the current well classification; removes the maximum 1800 gallon per minute well capacity; removes special spacing requirements for smaller wells being drilled near larger wells; allows owners of domestic and livestock wells to provide an easement to owners of larger wells to drill closer than the spacing allows; and allows an owner to have one well closer than the spacing rules would normally allow. The rules clarify that a well replaced by another well must be plugged, capped or equipped and constructed as a domestic or livestock well. The maximum permitted well density is amended to one well per 64 acres and the rules clarify how well density in a groundwater production unit, not evenly divisible by 64, will be treated. Lastly, the rules require the well density to include all capped wells. A capped well is a well that still exists but has been covered.

Chapter 4 "Water Quality, Well Construction and Required Equipment" maintains the well location accuracy requirement at ten yards; requires that well casing perforations on new wells not be installed above the groundwater level; and exempts domestic wells and public water supply wells from the district's check valve specifications, provided they meet other state standards.

Chapter 5 "Water Flow Meters and Alternative Measuring Methods" incorporates the district's metering and production reporting manual into the rules. The rules also allow a meter to be placed at a newly constructed well and at a central collection point in a GPU of less than 640 acres, instead of on every well of the GPU. This chapter clarifies that the district can audit any meter system for accuracy.

Chapter 6 "Allowable Annual Production and Reporting" amends the groundwater conservation reserve, so that it cannot be transferred between any parties. The rule would allow a prorated reserve to stay with a GPU, if only a portion of the GPU is sold and the ownership of the original GPU does not change. The conservation reserve rule is a benefit created by the district to encourage conservation and was initially drafted to provide increased annual allowable production limits to the conserver during the transition from annual allowable production limits of two acre-feet per acre, to one and one-half acre-feet per acre, per year. The rule also assisted the conserver during a time of need, such as drought. The conservation reserve was never intended to be a "property right." The old rule that allowed the transfer of the conservation reserve by gift or inheritance was intended to benefit family operated farms where the family had earned the conservation reserve. However, the limited authority to transfer the reserve by gift or inheritance has been legally challenged, because it appears to favor one groundwater producer over another.

Chapter 7 "Groundwater Production Units" amends the information standards required in setting up a GPU; repeals the term "pooling or pooled unit"; repeals the requirement to file the declaration at the courthouse; allows the most distant diagonal corners of the GPU be lengthened from 15,000 feet to 25,000 feet apart; and establishes that any new well will be immediately placed in a GPU. The rules set instructions for drawing the GPU boundary between two tracts of groundwater rights with the same ownership.

Chapter 8 "Adjustments to Allowable Annual Production to Achieve Desired Future Conditions" moves rules adopted in 2014 under District Rule 4 to this chapter. These rules set the method of analyzing, and if necessary, decreasing the annual withdrawal limit to achieve the district's 50-year desired future condition goals.

Chapter 9 "Waste of Groundwater" amends the rules to simply state that the waste of groundwater is prohibited and moves previous Rule 22 to this chapter.

Chapter 10 "Deposits and Fees" incorporates in this chapter all deposits and fees associated with Rules 13 and 14 in the previous rules, including production fees for the area in Dallam County that was annexed in 2012. That area elected not to pay ad valorem taxes upon entry to the district. The rules require public notice before the board may change the amount of any deposit or fee.

Chapter 11 "Hearing Procedures" moves to this chapter the commentary from Chapter 7 and Rules 24.1 – 26.10 and 27.1 of the previous rules.

Chapter 12 "Enforcement of Rules" moves to this chapter Rules 29.1- 29.5 of the previous rules.

Chapter 13 – "Definitions" moves to this chapter the definitions from Chapter 1 of the previous rules and repeals definitions no longer used; amends definitions to accurately reflect the use of current terms; and adds definitions to explain new terms.

Chapter 14 "Effective Date of These Rules" moves previous District Rule 30 to this chapter.

Copies of the new rules can be found on the district's website www.northplainsgcd.org A copy can be obtained from the district electronically by emailing swalthour@northplainsgcd.org, through the district office located at 603 E. 1st St., Dumas, Texas 79029, or ordered by telephone at 806-935-6401.

"NPGCD's new rules include a provision allowing a producer to install a meter at a new well and a central collection point on a groundwater production unit (GPU) less than 640 acres , rather than installing meters on every well in the GPU."

New Communicator Joins District Team

The North Plains Groundwater Conservation District is happy to welcome a recent addition to its team in Dumas.

As conservation outreach assistant, Lynsey Meharg will focus on engaging the public, both agricultural and residential, with what is currently happening in the district. Through the use of social media, educational opportunities and district publications, Meharg hopes to build support for the district through communication with its stakeholders.

Meharg, a native of Florida, is no stranger to agricultural communications. Growing up on her family's commercial cattle operation, she understands the challenges that farmers face. Meharg's experiences working with agriculturally-minded organizations also helped shape her perspective.

"Working with a variety of agricultural organizations, I have a unique perspective on different aspects of how a community can be affected by water," Meharg said. "For that reason and many more, I am very excited to begin working with everyone in the district."

Meharg began her agricultural career as a 4-H and FFA member before being elected as a Florida FFA State Officer. During her term from 2010 to 2011, Meharg worked with high school students to develop their leadership and communication skills. Meharg feels this experience will serve her well in the district.

"Working with students is always very rewarding," Meharg said. "However, when you're teaching them about something, like water, that has such a far-reaching impact on our community, that reward is exponentially greater."

While at Connors State College, Meharg was a member of the livestock judging team and was nominated to take pictures for the college's annual bull sale. In 2012, Meharg obtained a part-time job creating digital signage, writing, designing publications and photographing events for Connors State College. This experience sparked Meharg's passion for communications.

"Prior to my time at Connors State, I'm not sure that communications had ever crossed my mind as a career choice," Meharg noted, mentioning that agricultural education had been her choice of major. "After working in the communications field, it became apparent that a career that combined education and advocacy in a creative context was what I had been looking for."

In addition, after graduating from Connors State, Meharg was selected as the Angus Productions, Inc., editorial intern for the summer 2013, where she further developed her skills.

Meharg, a recent agricultural communications graduate of Texas Tech University, credits her experience at Tech with teaching her a great deal in and out of the classroom. She served as a 2013 State Fair of Texas Livestock Public Relations intern, worked as a 2013 American Royal media intern, took a part-time job as a communications intern with Texas Corn Producers and the Texas Peanut Producers Board before wrapping up her internship experience as a media intern at the 2015 National Western Stock Show.

"I couldn't have asked for a better education in agricultural communications," Meharg said. "It's a great honor to grow from those experiences and begin working with a group of people such as the stakeholders of the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District."

Meter Program

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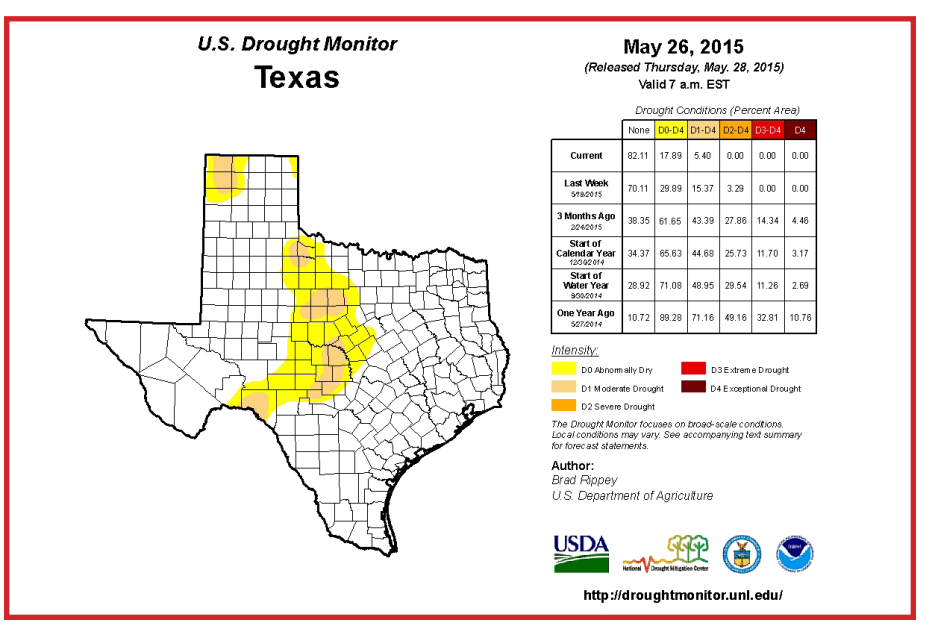
Persons wishing to apply for meter reimbursement should be aware of the following:

- One half (½) the actual cost of each meter installed on an agricultural irrigation well is eligible for reimbursement.
- Must complete registration with the district.
- Registration is no guarantee of reimbursement. Reimbursement is contingent upon program funds availability and meeting program requirements.
- Reimbursement is on a first come, first served basis.
  - First come, first served does not mean first to register their intention to seek reimbursement.
  - First come, first served does mean first to complete the entire process of registering, completing all paperwork, installing all meters, receiving district inspections, furnishing all necessary receipts to the district and requesting reimbursement.
- Installation costs, other equipment costs, labor costs and meters for nonagricultural irrigation purposes are not eligible for reimbursement.
- The applicant must agree to provide certain information to the district annually.

Applications and guidelines are available to be downloaded from the district's web site http://www.northplainsgcd.org/ or from the district office at 603 E First St, Dumas TX, 79029.

For questions and additional information not contained in this article please contact Dale Hallmark by email dhallmark@northplainsgcd.org or at the district office or by phone at 806-935-6401.



200-12 Project

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irrigation methods. In addition, in Ochiltree County, with an irrigation capacity of 5 gpm per acre, Danny Krienke produced 217 bushels per acre with 14.42 inches of irrigation and 7.76 inches of seasonal rainfall. Improved soil water monitoring shows the crop extracted an additional 3.34 inches of pre-season stored soil water. A total of 25.52 inches were used to produce the 217 bushel per acre corn yield. His field produced 15.04 bushels per inch of irrigation. Both growers used soil moisture probes to manage irrigation. Grall's field received hail damage in June, however the crop was still in an early growth stage and was able to recover and maintain the 201 bushel per acre yield.

Six of the ten participating producers applied less than 26 inches of total water to the crop, with four of those producing yields of 192 bushels or higher. The average total water for all "200-12" fields was 27.68 inches, still more than 4 inches below traditional irrigation methods, with an average yield of 198 bushels. The average irrigation for the "200-12" fields was 17.59 inches compared to 18.36 in the 2013 demonstrations, while the average yield slipped slightly from 200 bushels per acre in 2013 to 198 in 2014. Seven of the "200-12" fields made more profit per inch of irrigation than their "control" fields, with the remaining three fields coming within seven, three and one percent, respectively, of the "control" field's profit per inch. The graph shows the net return per acre inch of applied irrigation for the 2014 demonstrations. The final report for the "200-12 Reduced Irrigation on Corn Demonstration project," is available on the district website at www.northplainsgcd.org.

In the meantime, a new project developed for the 2015 and, potentially, additional growing seasons is moving forward. Though the "200-12" project has concluded, a new set of field-scale demonstrations are already in progress. The next generation of the "200-12" project is called the "3-4-5 Grain Production Maximization" Project, "3-4-5 GPM" or more simply, just "3-4-5." Participants in the current "3-4-5" project will utilize variable rate irrigation to apply 3, 4, and 5 gallons per minute per acre in side-by-side, production field-scale demonstrations. The "3-4-5" participants will apply the techniques and technologies used in the "200-12", and demonstrate their applications under the different levels of irrigation. Early season rains have delayed planting for most participants in the "3-4-5" project, though you won't hear much complaining. Once the crops are planted they will have the advantage of a full soil profile, because of the recent rains and the opportunity for some to leave water in the ground last year for the first time since 2011. Grant support from the Texas Water Development Board will assist in the "3-4-5" project into 2018.

District Joins with Cities to Distribute Free Conservation Tools

While summer time is time for vacations and fun, it also usually means record temperatures, limited rainfall, and peak water demands for the cities of the northern Panhandle. In order to help city's conserve water during this difficult time, the cities and the district have combined efforts with local media outlets to present *Operation: Summer Showers*. *Operation: Summer Showers* is a program to provide residents with conservation tools and information to show them how they can save water in their everyday lives.

Operation: Summer Showers is intended to address water conservation issues related to lack of showers outdoors and the high percentage of water used for showering and other household uses. Lawn watering is the number one domestic use in the summer, while showering, laundry, and other uses indoors account for most of the domestic water use year-round.

"While we have received more rainfall, this summer, we can't be sure how long it will last, so conservation will remain a priority," said Kirk Welch, Assistant General Manager- Outreach. "While supplies last, low-flow showerheads and rain/sprinkler gauges are being distributed along with tips on efficient lawn watering and in-home water use."

The free water-saving tools are available at the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Office at 603 E 1st Street in Dumas and at City Hall in Booker, Spearman, Stinnett, Stratford, Dumas, Dalhart and Perryton. For more information on Operation: Summer Showers call the district office at 806-935-6401, email kwelch@northplainsgcd.org or log onto www.northplainsgcd.org.

You can also follow us on twitter and "Like" the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District on Facebook to keep up with what is happening within the district.

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Let the Games Begin

Each year, the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District's annual "Save Our Planet's Water" Festivals are held in three cities across our district in order to inspire fourth grade students to be conservation minded. The festivals include water activities and games, as well as information from entities like the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife, the TDPW Fisheries, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and many local groups interested in impacting students in their communities. The festivals, a staple since 2005, reach over 800 students yearly from Dalhart, Dumas, Perryton and their surrounding communities.

Save Paper and Water by Choosing our E Newsletter

North Plains GCD now offers our district newsletters by email. If you would like us to send you a digital copy of the newsletter, you can go online at www.northplainsgcd.org and fill out the form on the right side of the page, or just email kwelch@northplainsgcd.org. You can also go online to download previous newsletters and find us on Facebook and Twitter.

How does water get where it's going and what does it pick up along the way? Students learned exactly that during the We All Live Downstream activity.