

32nd ANNUAL MEETING IN HOXIE

The 32nd Annual Meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, February 21, 2007 in Hoxie, KS at the Elks Lodge beginning at 1:00 p.m. CST. The agenda will include:

- ◆ 31st Annual Meeting Minutes;
- ◆ Board elections (SD, GH, LG and GO Counties);
- ◆ Proposed 2008 Operating Budget;
- ◆ 2006 Audit Report; and
- ◆ New overpumping program - a State/GMD approach
- ◆ An Open Session for pertinent public comment/discussion.

Incumbents Mitch Baalman (SD), Doug David (GH), Scott Maurath (LG) and Dave Mann (GO) are up for election. At press time, all incumbents except Doug David (GH) have filed to run again. Anyone interested in running for one of these positions should contact the district office for a nominating petition, or one can be downloaded from the district website at: www.gmd4.org/form1.html. You must reside in the County represented by the position and be an eligible voter to run. Nominating petitions should be received by the office no later than February 14, 2007, but should you plan on running and miss this deadline, you can also be nominated from the floor if you attend the meeting, someone nominates you and the nomination receives 2 seconds.

In addition to all routine items, the proposed 2008 budget must also consider continued funding of the Conservation Foundation at approximately \$70,000.00.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAM RE-ADOPTED

The current management program that became effective March 9, 2006 was re-adopted for another year by board action December 14, 2006. With this re-adoption, the board also decided to take a very close look in anticipation of either amending it next year or re-adopting it again. The review will start by looking at every goal statement contained therein and evaluating how well it has been met. Goals not satisfactorily met will either need to be eliminated because they are no longer important, or, have new approaches applied.

This could and should be a public process among the district members. The current Management Plan with all stated goals is available from the office or on the web page. If you have direction or suggestions to the board, please submit your ideas, questions, or comments to any board member or to the office.

NEW OVERPUMPING PROGRAM UNDERWAY

The GMD4 board last meeting approved in concept an enhanced overpumpers program in cooperation with the Division of Water Resources (DWR) - pending agreement on specific implementation details such as when and how triggers will be reached and what fines or other administrative penalties will be applied.

Discussion suggestions included the generation of a state order for all water rights within GMD 4 that were reported overpumped at least 2 years between the years 2000 and 2005. The order would mandate that the right not be overpumped again or an administrative fine would be levied. While past reports would trigger the order, no actions would be taken if the rights were never overpumped again. New cases of overpumping would be handled similarly after their second overpump. The final details have not yet been set, but for sure a new approach will be forthcoming soon. Some details to be set include the size of fines, number and/or quantity of overpumps before triggering, other penalties rather than fines and the implementation schedule.

This topic has been added to the annual meeting agenda and an update of this effort will be provided at the GMD 4 annual meeting in Hoxie on February 21, 2007 (see above).

KANSAS WATER AUTHORITY POSITIONS TO BE FILLED

Several KWA positions are being appointed this month including the position representing the 3 western Kansas groundwater management districts currently held by Dave Brenn of GMD3. The process calls for each western Kansas GMD (1, 3 and 4) to submit the name of a board member as a nomination to Governor Sebelius who either appoints one of the nominees or refuses them all and asks for 3 new names. During the December board meeting, the GMD 4 board submitted the name of Lon Frahm for consideration. GMD's 3 and 1 both nominated Dave Brenn for re-appointment. In this case, Governor Sebelius has 2 quality names from which to choose.

COLORADO WELL PROBLEMS

440 Colorado farmers were ordered on May 5, 2006 to shut off their irrigation wells to save water during a long drought. Many of these folks went to and asked lawmakers in Denver to find a solution to water shortages. Tom Cech, manager of the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District, told the state legislature that the alternative was the sale of more farms. The water court decision to turn off these 440 wells in the South Platte River drainage was to insure that farmers and cities with senior water rights got their legal share. State law only allows "junior" wells to operate if the users can prove that they can replace water when it's needed downstream, and many cannot.

Some of the affected farmers discovered that private investigators had been spying on them to see if they were watering crops illegally. After hearing rumors of illicit irrigation, water attorneys for the cities of Sterling, Boulder, and Highlands Ranch and those farmers with senior rights hired the investigators. The investigators filed complaints on about 50 instances of illegal irrigation with the State Engineer. Following state investigations, 48 of these complaints were exonerated for various reasons. No word yet on what penalties there may be for the few illegal pumpers. The well owners were especially miffed at the timing of the orders which came out after they had gotten indications that some water could be pumped in 2006, and their operational inputs had been paid accordingly. This has been a bad situation - all around.

GMDA MEETING IN ALBUQUERQUE

The Groundwater Management Districts Association (GMDA) will hold its annual conference in Albuquerque, NM, January 7-10, 2007 at the Nativo Lodge. John D'Antonio, New Mexico State Water Engineer will keynote the affair. Other speakers will be: Wade Kress, USGS, TX; Lucia Barbato Texas Tech Director of Geospatial Technology; and Mike Hightower, Sandia National Lab. Various GMD personnel will present other talks, including Debra Hughes, Director of the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts.

There also will be a tour of Sandia National Lab and several other events for conference goers and their spouses. Visit the GMDA website for more info: www.gmdausa.org, or contact any GMDA board member. Ken Carver and the Permian Basin Water Conservation District of Texas are hosting the conference this year.

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High Priority Areas Set

As you recall, the High Plains Aquifer entities agreed to identify high, medium and low priority aquifer sub-unit areas and start addressing the water table declines within the high priority areas first. The process was included in the state water plan which asked the local GMD's (and DWR in non-GMD areas) to identify the priority areas and coordinate local enhanced management strategies. The GMD4 board during its December, 2006 meeting completed the task of designating the high priority areas - shown on the map at the right.

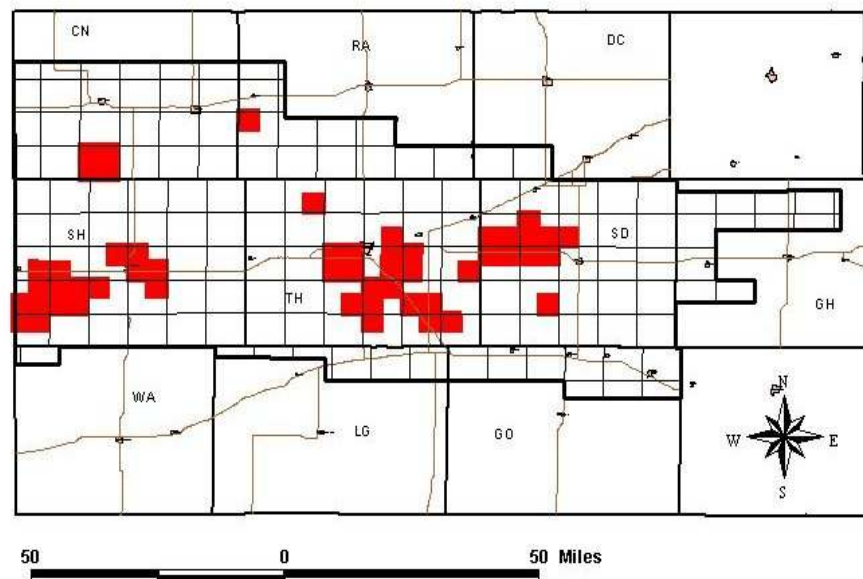
These areas are: **Any quarter township that includes 2 or more sections which have either a 9% or more decline in saturated thickness between 1996 and 2002, or, have a 2-mile reported water use density greater than 275 acrefeet/section.** All sections with less than 15 feet of saturated thickness or less than 25 acrefeet of 2-mile reported water use density have been eliminated. The map shows the district boundaries and the township boundaries within the district. Sorry for the lack of township labels - the map is too small.

The next step in this process is for the board to critically review the data to not only make certain these areas actually merit a high priority designation, but to also ascertain if the data can support management decisions at these smaller scales. Once the data review is complete, our protocol indicates that the next step are public meetings within each high priority area with the land owners and water users to present the data, cover the protocol process, discuss area goals and come to consensus on management programs or other means to reach the goals. This is where the public participation will be the most important.

There will be much more information on this process as it continues. For more detail, contact the office or visit the web page at:

www.gmd4.org/newstuff.html

GMD 4 High Priority Aquifer Sub-Unit Areas



DROUGHT MONITOR IMPROVED

The U.S. Drought Monitor at <http://drought.unl.edu/dm> has been improved by providing new "regional" and "state" views in addition to the full, US view. Just click on the US map for a regional view (4-5 states) and then on the state for the state view. While this is an improved product, you aren't necessarily going to like what you see this week for Kansas or Nebraska. This page will allow you to keep up with the changing drought conditions, though. It also provides several experimental pages which blend other drought indices for different perspectives.

The Water Table

Sponsored by the NW Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4, 1175 S. Range, Colby, KS 67701-0905. Office hours: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday (except the noon hour) - closed during State holidays.

DIRECTORS: Roger Zwegardt - St Francis, CN Cty; Monty Biggs - Atwood, RA/DC Cty; Jeff Deeds - Goodland, SH/WA Cty; Dave Rietcheck - Treasurer, Goodland, SH/WA Cty; Jon Friesen - Colby, TH Cty; Lon Frahm - Colby, TH Cty; Mitch Baalman - Vice President, Menlo, SD Cty; Bill Nondorf - Hoxie, SD Cty; Doug David - Hill City, GH Cty; Scott Maurath - President, Oakley, LG Cty; Dave Mann - Secretary, Quinter, GO Cty.

STAFF: Wayne Bossert - Manager; Ray Luhman - Assistant Manager; Dan Simmering - Field Technician; Rita Wade - Secretary/Receptionist; Ron Vignery - Attorney.

ADDRESS CORRECTIONS ARE APPRECIATED

Pumping the Tailwater

Editorial Comment by Wayne Bossert, GMD 4 Manager

IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT TOOL

"Water Optimizer" is a spreadsheet irrigation management tool developed by UNL to help producers make the cropping and irrigation choices that will result the optimum monetary return when limited water is available. The current version is available from the web at: <http://extension-water.unl.edu>. Just recently UNL received a grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) to improve the program - including more crop options and a wider user area covering irrigated areas of Colorado and Kansas. RMA hopes to use this tool in offering crop insurance coverage for deficit irrigation management practices, which it currently does not do.

I am most interested in the RMA offer of insurance coverage for deficit irrigation operations. As of now, a producer can insure fully irrigated crops or non-irrigated crops - period. The operator who wants to cut inputs (including irrigation water use) and shoot for lower (optimal) yield goals must assume all the risk of not meeting deficit irrigation yield goals.

My first thought of this new RMA offering was very positive. With the risk of deficit irrigation now manageable, surely more producers would be encouraged to reduce production inputs and aim for optimum (rather than maximum) crop yields - thus netting similar amounts of money and saving water to boot. This is especially important in water limited areas.

However, I also wonder if the RMA program could, under just the right set of conditions, actually result in producers increasing consumptive water use - especially with the help of the Water Optimizer tool designed to evaluate the profitability of virtually every crop combination plausible. Giving it more than a passing thought, I believe it could, but, over the universe of participants I don't think it's going to happen.

This situation points out once again the choices of water policy in Kansas where slowing water table declines AND shoring up the ag economy are both important goals. I hope that RMA can offer the deficit insurance protection and implement it in a way that insures a net reduction in irrigation consumptive water use. In this venue, the Water Optimizer is likely to become an even more important tool - addressing directly the farmer's production economics.

THE NATURE OF A KANSAS WATER RIGHT

Terms, conditions and limitations..... Every water right in the state has a specific list of "terms, conditions and limitations" which apply to that right. These are important items for each producer to understand and to make sure the water right's operation is consistent with. The most common terms (not all water rights will have the same terms, conditions and limitations) are: The priority date assigned to the right; the specific location of the point of diversion (well or surface diversion); the description of the authorized place of use; the specific source of water; the specific use made of water; the maximum rate of diversion that can be pumped; the maximum quantity of water that can be diverted, specific time constraints for completing the diversion point and for perfecting the allowed rate and quantity; maintaining use records and reporting same; no impairment on existing water rights or prejudicial affect on the public interest; and any overlap conditions if other water rights are involved.

Most water rights also contain the specific condition that all the stated terms, conditions and limitations of the right must be heeded or the right will be forfeited and dismissed. For this reason alone every water right owner should review his or her terms, conditions and limitations every now and again.

If you need help in reviewing or understanding your water right, contact your GMD (if you are in a GMD) or the Division of Water Resources otherwise. The new overpump program (covered elsewhere in this edition) is directly addressing one of these limitations. Water will get important enough that eventually every term and condition may become very important.